THE UNFORGIVING OFFENDER

JOHN REED SCOTT

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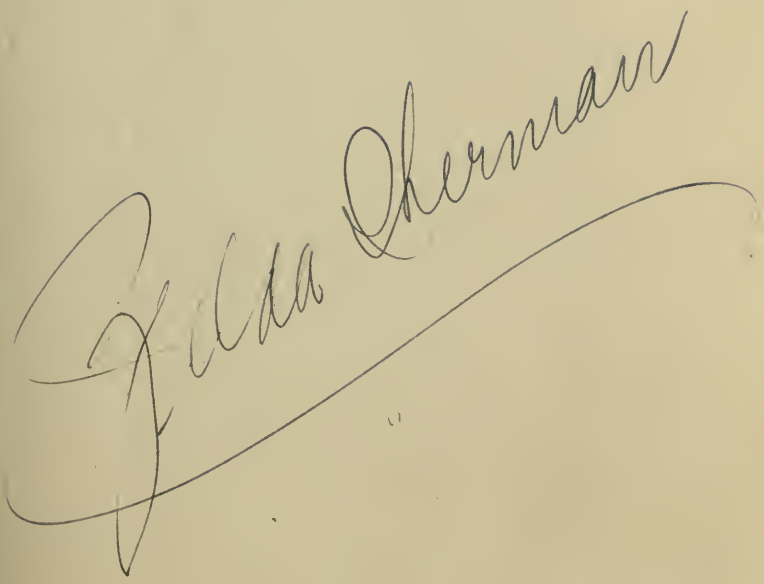

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THE UNFORGIVING OFFENDER

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PENDLETON PUT HIS ARM THROUGH HIS BRIDLE-REIN AND CAME FORWARD

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THE UNFORGIVING OFFENDER

BY

JOHN REED SCOTT

AUTHOR OF "THE COLONEL OF THE RED HUZZARS," "THE LAST TRY," "THE WOMAN IN QUESTION," "THE FIRST HURDLE," ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOR
BY CLARENCE F. UNDERWOOD

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TO THE KNOCKERS WITH WHOM I USED
TO LUNCH AT THE PITTSBURGH CLUB THIS
BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED
BY THE ONE WHO NEVER KNOCKED

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THE UNFORGIVING OFFENDER

I

MONTAGUE PENDLETON AND SOME OTHERS

The grill-room of the Otranto Country Club was filled with the usual Saturday afternoon throng—the card players, the tennis players, the golf players, and those who chose to do nothing.

Around a large circular table in the centre of the room were gathered a crowd of the younger members, who had sufficient youth in them to ignore rheumatism and neuralgia and the other penalties bred by damp flannels and wet shoes. They had come in from court or course, and not stopping for a bath and a rub and fresh garments had plunked themselves down in vacant chairs, and joined in throwing once around for the drinks. In an hour or so they would get the belated hot shower and the change of clothes, and be none the worse for the delay. Happy youth!

A little way off, around another table similar in size, were those who dressed first and drank afterward. They were not so noisy—their spirits did not bubble forth. Other tables were scattered through the room for such as wished a quiet chat with a friend or two—or a game of cards; though there were not many who could play amid such confusion.

The ninth and eighteenth holes were directly in view from the south windows and a foursome was on the former green. A caddy came scurrying across toward the Club-house; a moment later one of the servants hurried out with a pitcher of water. He poured four glasses and offered them to the players. The last to be handed the tray was a tall, heavy, elderly man with a jowly face and coarse features.

"If you've all got as much as you want," he said, "I'll take the rest," and ignoring the glass he grasped the pitcher, and burying his beefy nose in its depth, drained it of the last drop.

"A-h!" he ended, wiping his expansive mouth with the back of his hand. "I have never got over my boyhood liking to drink out of the pitcher. It tastes different. Don't you think so?"

"Why not have a pitcher served at your table instead of a glass, Emerson?" one of the players asked.

"I'd like to but mother won't let me!" Emerson laughed. "She says it's not *au fait*, or *savoir faire*, or *on dit*, or something or other."

"It's not '*deshabille*,' you mean?" some one suggested.

"Damn if I know what it is, but you understand!" Emerson laughed again. "My wife is a climber and she lugs me up with her, but I'm a powerful drag at times, I fear—especially in manners. However, I tell her that I put up the money and she and Marcia can supply the rest what's necessary."

They went down to the locker rooms, nodding to three men in the grill-room window as they passed.

"Poor old Emerson," said Pendleton, looking after them. "He is all right at heart but such a blundering bounder. Among the men he can get along, but the women are a bit trying to him, I fancy."

"The Emersons must have climbed over the bars while I was away—how did they arrange it?" asked Sheldon Burgoyne, who had been abroad for the last three years.

"Easy. They have a very good looking daughter who went to Dobbs Ferry—she got to know the nice girls there and made good with them. Her mother has the social bee and is a schemer. Emerson has the requisite collateral and—attention to this part, please—he owned a bit of ground which the Country Club simply had to have, and he consented to sell it—if, and when, we would elect him to membership. Naturally, we elected."

"I see," mused Burgoyne, watching his cigarette smoke float lazily out the window.

"What do you see?" Devereux smiled.

"The usual thing. Father is impossible, but a good sort—mother is a pusher and, I dare say, fat—yes?—and daughter is not only a beauty but also something of a winner. Is she captured yet?"

"Not officially!" Pendleton answered; "but I understand that she is not without suitors," with a bit of a smile.

"With papa having the stuff! I reckon not, Malvolio," returned Burgoyne. "Give a woman

money, and looks and some slight social position, and you can trust her for the rest—even if the boys are backward, which in this instance isn't likely."

"The Emersons are not the only 'new' ones the Club has admitted recently," Pendleton remarked.

"Not by several dozen, my friend!" exclaimed Devereux. "In ten years society will have passed from the control of those who are to those who weren't."

"Progress!" said Burgoyne. "The march of improvement for the bettering of the species. New blood—new blood!"

"Just so! Aristocracy of dollars is replacing aristocracy of birth," Pendelton commented. "It's the way of the world, since time began—money is the basis of our social structure, on it we stand, without it we fall."

"Doesn't culture count at all?" Devereux asked.

"Culture isn't considered in the first instance," Pendleton replied. "It's an asset but it isn't in the least essential. Riches with culture are desirable, but riches alone are sufficient. Culture is decreasing as riches increase."

"Just a trifle iconoclastic!" laughed Burgoyne. "You always were an idol breaker, Pendleton."

"Is this proof of it?" Pendleton asked, indicating those in the grill-room.

"Hum!—I reckon not," Burgoyne confessed, letting his eyes run over the crowd.

"Here are sixty or seventy of our *best* people, and how many belonged two generations ago—or

even one generation? You and Devereux and I, and a half dozen others perhaps. The rest were nobodies. Yet to-day they outnumber us ten to one.—They have bought their way into the old clubs—their children have bought their way into the exclusive dancing classes, their wives have bought their way through the fashionable charities into the fashionable cotillons. Money—money—money! Everything is money and money is everything. The golden key unlocks all doors."

"The old order changeth, giving place"—began Burgoyne.

"Sentimentalize, that's right!" Pendleton exclaimed. "It's about all that's left to us to do—except to go along with the bunch, and keep our hands in our pockets to keep theirs out."

"Aren't the new ones even *honest?*" Burgoyne asked.

"They haven't shown it as yet."

"Do you think our ancestors were any different?"

"Possibly not—but they are dead and we are entirely respectable!" smiled Pendleton. "Moreover it required a century for them to pry open the doors—and culture was acquired while they were prying. Now—the doors are jimmied open while you wait."

"I thought you said they opened them with a golden key," Burgoyne remarked.

"They pry them open with the gold key, Sir Captious—is that plain to you?"

"It's the survival of the fittest," suggested Devereux.

"On the basis of the dollar mark—yes."

"Which we have agreed is the universal basis now-a-days," said Burgoyne. "Tell me, who is the young woman who has just driven up in the cart?"

Pendleton glanced out in time to see a tall girl in a blue gown and a picture hat toss the reins of the dancing bay to a groom and spring lightly from her high perch.

"*That* is Miss Emerson," he answered. "Does the world-wanderer approve of her style?"

"Pretty fit!" was the reply. "Especially fit with such a father. Is it the mother?"

"No—it's *not* the mother," said Pendleton decidedly; "and we can't go back any further. I'll present you if you wish."

"She *is very* good looking," Burgoyne reflected.

"If you go upstairs you'll likely see plenty more with the same opinion," Devereux remarked. "She is the most popular girl in the Club, if attentions count and the number of the attentioners." He pushed back his chair. "I think I'll go up myself—come along?"

"Not now, thank you," Burgoyne declined. "I shall sit here with Pendleton and be put wise to the changes that have occurred in my absence."

"You'll keep him busy—as changers we're in the chameleon class. So long!" and with a nod he went upstairs.

"*He* hasn't changed!" Burgoyne laughed.

"No—Dev is the same innocent fusser he always was—coming down every year to the debutantes, as blithesome as a boy and as harmless. It's an avocation with him—when business hours are over. And it's astonishing how well he does both."

"Who is he fussing now—in particular?"

"Miss Emerson—he has been fussing her for two years—and she plays him well."

"Seriously, you think?"

"No one takes Devereux's attentions seriously—not even himself."

"Two years is a long time with our friend. He used to last a year at the most, then flit away to another bud. I didn't see her close but she looks at least fifteen years younger than he."

"About that, I fancy," said Pendleton. "Moreover, one can never judge what Devereux's actions mean—except that they don't mean what they would naturally imply."

"Do you think he is actually interested in the Emerson girl?" Burgoyne inquired.

"I don't know—I question if he himself knows—only it has been, for him, most unusual and lasting."

"How's the girl?"

"You mean what is her attitude toward Devereux?"

"No—how is she herself?"

"Pretty good sort," said Pendleton. "I don't know her well at all; I see her at the dances—at dinner—at cards—across the tennis net—on the golf course—the way one meets, you know—and she im-

presses me always as distinctively likable. A square girl, I should call her."

"That is high praise from you, old man," Burgoyne remarked. "I shouldn't want higher, if I were a woman."

"Oh, piffle!" Pendleton scoffed.

"It isn't piffle, nor nonsense, nor anything of the sort," returned the other. "I knew the time when your *ipse dixit* went far to make or break a debutante."

"Forget it, Sheldon! Don't cast up my past sins—I'm trying to bury them."

"Are you succeeding?"

"I hope so! At least I've deluded myself with the idea until some reminding friend comes along and digs up a bunch of them and shakes the bones." He touched a bell. "Take Mr. Burgoyne's order," he said to the boy. "I'm going to drink a silver fizz—have one."

"Not on your life!" exclaimed Burgoyne. "I'm not fond of soap suds as a beverage. I prefer them with my bath."

"Every one to his taste," said Pendleton. "There goes Miss Emerson again, with Devereux *et al.* in tow," nodding toward the window.

"She looks like a thoroughbred," Burgoyne reflected, watching her swing across the links to the tennis courts. "It's a pity she has such a bounder for a father."

"The mother is worse; he is good natured and tries to be liked—she, however, comes pretty near being impossible."

"But she is a schemer—a manager, you say?"

"And she has managed this campaign to perfection, I admit. She must have lain awake nights for years scheming the moves. I saw it begin ten years ago—when the Emersons first appeared at a quiet summer hotel where some of our nice people went. She worked slowly, being content to make progress by degrees—to pick up a nodding and speaking acquaintance with the old families, and have her daughter get to know their daughters. Children, you know, are neither discriminating nor particular; if they like one, they don't ask for credentials. That is how Marcia Emerson got to know those who later, when she went away to school, became her friends. The campaign of *ma mère* has never relaxed in all those years—but it has taken many ramifications. The Club's needing the piece of ground was a fortunate accident—of the dame's foresight. She heard one day that we had bought here—the next day she had put the idea into Emerson's head to buy also. She meant to get in—and she got."

"One always admires a general!" commented Burgoyne. "At present I suppose she is engaged in stalking a prospective son-in-law?"

"Precisely—and she has him stalked; but daughter may spoil her plans—she has a mind of her own where she is intimately connected, I fancy. She has not got that black hair and dark eyes for nothing."

"Hum!" said Burgoyne, watching her with an appraising glance. "She sure is a looker—I don't blame the fellows for dancing attendance. If it were

a couple of hundred years earlier they would be rapiering one another behind the coffee-house at sunrise. . . . Who is the man Madame Emerson has selected for her daughter?"

"Our friend."

"Not Warwick Devereux?"

Pendleton smiled acquiescence.

"Good Lord! Does Devereux know it?"

"I fancy not!" Pendleton laughed—"but those who are looking on with a knowing eye are wise to the mater's plan. Oh, she is a manager and a schemer all right."

"Does *Miss Emerson* know it?" Burgoyne asked.

"If she does she's not betraying it—though she can't be blind to Devereux's dollars nor to his worth."

"Nor to his family," the other added.

Pendleton nodded. "It will be a great stroke for Mrs. Emerson if she can marry her daughter into the Devereux-d'Este connection. Then she can rest from her labors and her works will follow her. She will have arrived."

"She is a trifle slow in coming into the dock, however," Burgoyne observed.

"Give her time—she's headed straight—has been from the start—and she has never missed a port yet. I've great faith in the old girl—she'll land Dev for the daughter, I'll bet a fiver on it. He is too old to stampede—she must drive him in slowly."

"You're mixing your metaphors!" Burgoyne laughed.

"Maybe I am—but she'll not get mixed in her

purposes. Have another drink?—No?—Then let us go up and sit on the piazza, and look at the real thing—the butterflies whose frivolities and frivoling make a country club endurable."

"Or unendurable!" his friend added.

"Depends on your point of view—and also your digestion. For my part, my digestion being normal I enjoy watching them—their methods: their little schemes, their jealousies, their punishments, their petty deceptions and meannesses—all interest me in a casual way. I like to sit back and study them—they amuse me."

"Is that all they do—amuse you?" Burgoyne asked. "Haven't they any kindness or generosity or unselfishness?"

"Not much—certainly not here at the Club. Every woman's hand is against every other woman, and she usually has a hat-pin concealed in it—if that's possible. It's trite but true that a woman is a good hater and a poor forgetter, and is utterly without conscience in matters of friendship or of truth."

"Where did you acquire all your cynicism?" Burgoyne demanded.

"With my years—and on the piazza!"

"Well, you would better find an optimistic chair and a clearer vision. You're flocking too much to yourself."

"Take the four yonder playing Auction," Pendleton continued, when they had settled into a retired corner. "They are as lovely young matrons as you will meet anywhere—far above the average indeed—

and they are inseparable; yet I myself have heard every one of them put the knife into the other three, and then give it a twist besides."

"And from it you argue——"

"From it and innumerable other instances I argue that, as among themselves, women have no conception of friendship—as men regard it. Men are more charitable;—though it is the charity of indifference—and it is without distinction as to sex. So long as he himself is not affected he cares nothing—when he *is* affected the woman always receives consideration."

"Exactly! the woman receives consideration from the man—and the man receives consideration from the woman. The man is in advance of her only in his indifference, and that is due mainly to temperament, and to his preoccupation in other things—he hasn't the time. The woman *has* the time."

"And if she hasn't time she finds it. I tell you a woman has neither charity nor justice toward a woman," Pendleton reiterated.

"You are putting it too broadly," said Burgoyne.

"As a general proposition it can't be put too broadly."

"What were you doing with yourself while I was away?" Burgoyne demanded.

"Observing life around me!"

"Through blue glasses and with a misanthrope's eyes."

"I was not aware of it."

"Of course you were not! No one ever is——

It requires a friend to make himself popular by telling you."

"What shall I tell *you?*" laughed Pendleton.

"Anything that's disagreeable—so long as it is the truth."

A rather large woman came down the piazza, nodding this way and that. She was beautifully gowned, in the very best taste and in the style that was calculated to soften her embonpoint into a gentle plumpness. A flush that was charmingly natural glowed on cheek and lip, her eyes were dark and delicately pencilled, her hands were bare of gloves and sparkled with rings. As she passed the corner where Pendleton and Burgoyne were sitting, she bowed effusively, and when they both arose and returned it she suddenly veered across.

"I'm so glad to see you!" she radiated.

Pendleton presented his friend.

"Welcome home, Mr. Burgoyne, if I may," she greeted. "Mr. Pendleton, won't you and Mr. Burgoyne dine with us here this evening?—just a little informal party—with some Auction later?"

Pendleton's glance shot questioningly at Burgoyne and got an answer.

"Thank you very much, Mrs. Emerson," said he. "I shall be delighted."

"It will give me much pleasure, you are very kind," Burgoyne assured her.

"Just as you are, no dressing you know—at seven-thirty on the piazza." And with a smile and an intimate little nod she went on.

"Will you please tell me why you signalled me to accept?" Pendleton inquired.

"Because I wanted you to accept."

"So I gathered—but why? why?"

"I want to see how the old dame does it—and whom she has."

"Couldn't you see quite as well without being in it?"

"Possibly—but I want to be in it.—Never refuse anything that promises enjoyment if you can accept, is my policy. I'm beginning to follow the line of least resistance—I've reached the age to justify it."

"Piffle!" said Pendleton—"you talk like a man of sixty."

"I'm thirty-four, which is quite old enough to warrant one in taking things by the smooth handle."

"Even Mrs. Emerson?"

"Even Mrs. Emerson. Moreover, I want to observe the daughter—and the table is an excellent place."

"You want to observe the daughter?" Pendleton inflected.

"Sure I do! Isn't there a campaign on to marry her to our old friend Devereux? I want to look her over—and, as I said, I don't know a better place than the table for the display of one's manners and inherent breeding—or the lack of them."

"Don't you think that Devereux is competent to judge for himself?"

"No one is competent to judge where the heart is involved; but don't think that I shall offer him advice

—Lord, no! I only want to see for my own satisfaction—and Miss Emerson is a strikingly handsome girl."

"The latter is nearer the truth, I reckon!" laughed Pendleton. "I should think you would have had a surfeit of pretty girls in three years' picking abroad."

"I never get surfeited with pretty girls. I'm like the chap in the song—'Oh, you dear delightful women, why, I simply love you all.' That's piffle, too, I suppose."

"Not at all," Pendleton observed. "I should call it a simple ebullition of spirits—otherwise plain drunk."

"Who—I?"

"No—not you—the fellow in the song. There will be a bunch more here, with similar delusions, about—eleven o'clock."

They smoked a while in silence, with a bow, now and then, to some one that passed, or a word about some one that arrived or departed. The piazza was filling up with the late comers, and with those from the grill-room. The tables were being set for dinner—rubber-shod waiters flitted about—the tinkle of glasses and the hiss of siphons punctuated the chatter of the crowd.

"How many are actually enjoying themselves?" said Pendleton with a wave of his hand to include every one on the piazza.

"Possibly half," Burgoyne answered—"the rest are bored to death."

"Half!" Pendleton laughed. "There isn't one in ten who wouldn't rather be somewhere else at this moment."

"Then there are about a hundred and fifty people who are putting up an amazingly good bluff."

"Bluff! What does that signify? Life is made up of bluff. We all are bluffers—it's a game of bluffer and bluffee—with the devil getting the one who is bluffed too often."

"You run to over-statements this afternoon!" Burgoyne remarked. "What is the matter; been pinched in the stock market—has some girl given you the mit—or are you letting some fool doctor tinker at you?"

"Which do you think it is?"

"It wouldn't be the first, and it couldn't be the second, so it must be the third.—Don't do it, Pendleton! A doctor is the most awful habit a well man can acquire—he never gets over it."

"Go to!" laughed Pendleton; "you're not in the fashion. It is the fad now-a-days to be treated by a specialist."

"A woman's fad, not a man's," said Burgoyne. "It *isn't* the stock-market, is it?"

"I'm not on the wrong side, if that is what you mean."

"And it couldn't by any chance be a woman?"

"It could but it isn't.—I reckon I'm just naturally cynical."

"Get over it, Pendleton, get over it—it's an awful habit for yourself and those around you! Be cheer-

ful, old man, be cheerful. It's just as easy and a whole heap more enjoyable. Look at me—why, I can——"

"Enjoy the prospect of dining with Mrs. Emerson! that is sufficient."

"Sufficient unto the mother is the daughter thereof. There are always compensations, if we only let ourselves see them."

"What if the daughter isn't there?" Pendleton suggested.

"That would be a calamity," Burgoyne answered. "However, we'll hope for the best."

"Are you thinking of entering the lists?"

"Go to, again! I said I'm interested for our friend!"

"How?"

"To see if Miss Emerson is worthy of the distinguished honor in store for her."

"What earthly good will your 'seeing' do, if you don't tell Devereux what you think?"

"None in the world, my friend!—It's pure——"

"Curiosity," Pendleton interjected. "I thought that you had overcome your early affliction by travel."

"Which is worse—curiosity or a grouch?" laughed Burgoyne.

"Neither is worse—they both are reprehensible and to be avoided. I'll make you a proposition—I'll get rid of my cynicism, pessimism or grouch, if you will get rid of your curiosity, or interest in the affairs of others, as you term it. Is it a bargain?"

"It is!—but we'll have to go to the Emerson dinner!" Burgoyne stipulated.

Again silence. Presently Burgoyne spoke—a trifle low.

"I see Harry Lorraine is here—how does he take it?"

"You mean the loss of his wife? Like a ninny. He has backed and filled until he has lost all sympathy. One day he thinks he will, the next day he thinks he won't. Either he should have got a gun and chased Amherst to the ends of the earth and shot the life out of him, or he should instantly have filed his suit for divorce. To my mind, he has only one course open now—to take her back and let by-gones be by-gones—if *she* will take him."

Burgoyne glanced at the other thoughtfully. Rumor had it that Pendleton himself was very fond of Stephanie Mourraille before she married Harry Lorraine; but rumor often lied, and he had not been here to verify it himself. He knew that she was a handsome, dashing woman, somewhat self-willed and given to having her own way, but amenable to influence and altogether lovable. When he went away Lorraine was crazy about her and the courtship was at its height. A little later, while he was in Europe, he got cards to their marriage. Then suddenly, after a year and a half, a friend's letter told him, *inter alia,* that Stephanie Lorraine had run off with Garret Amherst—a man twice her age, and with a wife and four children—and that they were supposed to have gone to India. Four months ago he had encountered them in

Paris—at the Cafè Laurent in the Champs Elysées; but when he started over to speak to them, they got up hurriedly and changed their table for one in a remote corner, so he took the hint and did not recognize them.

"What in the devil possessed her?" he asked. "Amherst is not particularly attractive."

"No—at least he is not attractive to the men—but they say he is the devil among the women, in a quiet way. I reckon it was his reputation that first caught Stephanie. After that he played her and—landed her. I didn't think, however, he would completely lose his head and run away with her."

"Amherst always struck me as exceedingly cool and calculating," Burgoyne observed.—"Still, one can never tell what love will do!"

"*Love!*" exclaimed Pendleton. "I wouldn't dignify it by any such name. Call it what it was!"

"If you call it *that* then why did they run away? They could have gratified it quite as well had they remained within the bounds of the conventional."

"It was the conventional which hampered:—they wanted to be unrestrained in its enjoyment. When a man and a woman reach that state they're little better than insane."

"I never took Stephanie to be one of that sort," Burgoyne reflected.

"She wasn't—until Amherst played his usual game—and got caught in his own net. My idea of it is that she wouldn't yield until he proved his devo-

tion by taking her away, and finally she got him so crazy he succumbed."

"I fancy that both of them have regretted it sadly enough long since."

"I'm sure of it. I understand that Amherst has made overtures to his wife looking to a reconciliation; and as he converted almost all his property before he left, she is considering whether a half loaf, with financial ease and Amherst, isn't to be preferred to no loaf, no money, and no Amherst. She's forty, you must remember, and not particularly good looking at that. She's not likely to have another chance, if she divorces him. So I'm betting she will permit him to return—*for the children's sake.*"

"And Stephanie?" asked Burgoyne. "There isn't any child there."

"I don't know!" said Pendleton slowly. "Normally she should be subdued and retiring—keep out of the way for a year or two. But you never can tell. Much depends on Lorraine's attitude.—If he were only half a man! but he isn't—he's a damn nincompoop."

"How could Lorraine go gunning for Amherst when he didn't know where to gun?" asked Burgoyne.

"He at least could have held his peace and shot Amherst on sight. But he didn't even do that—he sniffled, and cried, and bemoaned, and didn't know his own mind for an hour at a time. I've no patience with him."

"It seems not!" agreed Burgoyne. "But you must remember Lorraine is young, and that not every

one is blessed with your calm determination and decision. I rather think the majority of men would do as he has done—temporize."

"Temporize! maybe—but he didn't even temporize; he shilly-shallyed like a weather cock."

"I see—you think that because Stephanie Lorraine had the courage to run off, and may have courage to return, she thereby has proven that she has nerve sufficient for both of them, so they would better hitch up again and go on in double harness!" laughed Burgoyne.

"That may be the truth!" said Pendleton, "but all I said was that if she will take him back he would better take her. They are about equally culpable, so they can wipe off the slate and start afresh."

"Do you really think that is possible?" Burgoyne inquired.

"Certainly it's possible!"

"Here—in this town?"

"Why not?—it is their *own* affair—no one has a scintilla of right to question their decision. A husband may take his wife back, surely!"

"Granted, in the abstract—but what will be Society's judgment upon the wife?"

"The men will forget it. The women will cease to remember—after a time."

"After a generation or two!" Burgoyne remarked.

"It depends on the woman herself—on how she acts," said Pendleton.

"Somewhat—but it depends more on the women and how they feel. You said, a moment ago, that

women were poor forgetters. This is one of the crimes they never forgive nor forget."

"Not exactly. They never forget the woman who has been unfortunate *before* marriage and has been found out. They have a slightly different code for a married woman who has gone wrong and is caught—and then rights herself. If she is prudent and has money, caste, and friends, she 'll pull herself through after a year or so."

"She will be more apt to pull through if her husband sticks to her," Burgoyne replied.

"I thought that was understood!" Pendleton responded.

"And if the husband—divorces her?"

Pendleton raised his hands.

"I don't know," he reflected. "Again, however, I think that it depends on the woman and money and caste and friends. What would be impossible for some is easily possible for others."

"How would it be with Stephanie Lorraine?" Burgoyne asked.

For a while Pendleton watched the smoke circle from his cigarette and was silent. Then he dropped the cigarette into the ash tray, slowly drew out another and lit it.

"She has money and caste—and she used to have plenty of friends," Burgoyne added.

"She hasn't as many friends as she once had," said Pendleton, slowly; "though what she has are powerful. Lorraine's and Mrs. Amherst's friends will be against her—and the fact that she ran away

with such a fellow as Amherst will be more against her than anything else. If she had chosen a popular young chap, instead of a middle-aged rouè-on-the-quiet, Society would be more ready with forgiveness."

Just then Devereux rounded the corner, with a paper in his hand, and hurried over.

"Have you seen the *Evening Telegraph?*" he asked. "No?—Well, Amherst has come back!"

"Back—to America?" asked Burgoyne.

"Back to *this town*—and gone again—with Mrs. Amherst and the children—to Europe! What do you think of that?"

Burgoyne gave a soft whistle of astonishment. Pendleton shrugged his shoulders a trifle and smiled grimly.

"You're not properly appreciative of news," declared Devereux. "Why don't you say something?"

"You don't appreciate news yourself," Burgoyne answered. "We are simply dumb with amazement."

"Is that the way it impresses you?" Devereux demanded, looking at Pendleton.

"Not at all!" said Pendleton. "I'm not surprised. It is just what I expected of Amherst."

"But Mrs. Amherst—to take him back!" Devereux exclaimed.

"It is the way of expediency under all the circumstances. She was wise."

"Well, I'd be damned if I would take him back!" Devereux declared.

"I don't fancy you would, Dev!" Pendleton smiled. "You're not a woman, you know."

"Does the *Telegraph* say anything as to Mrs. Lorraine's whereabouts?" Burgoyne asked.

"They can't locate her but they think she is in New York," Devereux answered—and went on with his news.

Pendleton, who was facing outward, suddenly leaned forward.

"The *Telegraph* seems to have made a poor guess," said he. "Yonder is Mrs. Lorraine now."

"Where?" Burgoyne cried, starting around.

"In the Victoria—coming up the drive."

"God!" Burgoyne exclaimed. "What a daring thing to do! And she is alone, too."

Pendleton got up.

"I'm going to meet her—will you come along?" he asked.

"I will, indeed," said Burgoyne. "I like Stephanie—and I like her nerve."

II

THE RETURN OF THE OFFENDER

Others than Pendleton had seen who was the occupant of the approaching Victoria. And the news spread like the wind, with a bustle and a buzz that swelled—grew louder and louder as the horses swung swiftly along the front and drew up at the entrance—suddenly to be hushed to a fearful calm as Montague Pendleton and Sheldon Burgoyne stepped out to meet her.

She saw the two men, and sat leaning on her sunshade, a smile on her lips, waiting—but without a glance toward the piazza and its expectant crowd:—a slender woman, gowned in white, with a great black hat topping auburn hair and shading a face that was almost flawless in its proud, cold beauty.

"My dear Stephanie, I am *glad* to see you!" said Pendleton.

"Do you mean it, Montague?" she asked, giving him her hand with a dazzling smile that softened her whole countenance and made it very tender.

"We do, indeed!" said Burgoyne, bowing over her other hand—while Pendleton took her sunshade.

There was a momentary pause. She looked from one to the other a bit questioningly—smiled again—and with a hand in each of theirs stepped lightly from the carriage.

"We have a table just around the corner—shall we go to it?" Pendleton suggested.

She shot him a glance from under her half-closed lids—a glance of appreciation and gratitude.

"If you don't mind," she replied—"I'm a bit afraid of these people."

They went slowly down the piazza; and the crowd, which had been dumb with amazement or curiosity or looking, suddenly began to talk like mad, and to occupy themselves with the tea things or with one another.

Mrs. Lorraine saw—and with a haughtily amused smile, with never a glance at any of them, with her head held high and her body turned a trifle so as to converse with Pendleton, she threaded her way between chairs and tables and people to the place reserved.

"Did you ever behold such brazenness!" exclaimed Mrs. Postlewaite when Mrs. Lorraine had passed.

"The shameless woman!" Mrs. Pearce echoed.

"It is a disgrace to the Club!" pronounced Mrs. Busbee.

"It is a disgrace to society!" declared Mrs. Porterfield. "What shall we do to manifest our disgust and disapproval?"

"Leave at once—it is positively contaminating to be near her," decided Mrs. Postlewaite.

And they went straightway—summoning their cars with much to-do and ostentatious show.

"Play! Play! be absorbed in the game—don't let on you've seen her!" whispered young Mrs. Carstairs, as Mrs. Lorraine drew near. . . . . .

"I didn't know what to do—I was facing her," said her partner, Mrs. Chilten.

"It didn't matter greatly what you did," smiled Mrs. Burleston. "She didn't look at any one—she ignored us all."

"She doesn't care a rap what we do—and she has proved it by coming here," said Mrs. Westlake. "She has got pluck, all right."

"I should call it effrontery," said Mrs. Carstairs, "hardened effrontery."

"I think she is to be pitied," Mrs. Westlake remarked.

"Are you prepared to pity her by offering friendship?" Mrs. Carstairs asked.

"It doesn't look as if she were asking any one for either pity or friendship," was the answer. "Moreover, I've known Stephanie Lorraine a long time—and she isn't that sort."

"When a woman runs away from her husband with a man—and comes back, she isn't any sort, in my opinion," Mrs. Carstairs sniffed.

"I hope, for the honor of our sex, that your opinion isn't ours as a class," Mrs. Westlake smiled.

"On the basis of *honor,* Mrs. Lorraine could not be even considered," was the retort.

"I bid one on no trump—let us play cards and not fuss," interposed Mrs. Chilten.

"And every one will do as she thinks best, anyway," said Mrs. Burleston. "I bid two on hearts."

The men had been in a quandary.

Some timid ones had followed the women's lead and

were looking elsewhere as Mrs. Lorraine went by—others, bachelors mainly, would have got up and bowed had she given them a glance, or even the encouragement of not ignoring them.

"I didn't know whether she would care to speak to me," said Devonshire. "Her attitude was not especially melting."

"The atmosphere on the piazza through the initial part of her progress wasn't calculated to thaw," remarked Smithers. "I never saw so icy a reception as the women gave her."

"They didn't have much on her," said Westlake. "She handed them as good as they sent—and handed it first. *I 'm* for Mrs. Lorraine."

"So are all the men, I fancy—but we would better not let our wives know it!" laughed Devonshire.

Smithers nodded. "They take her—conduct as a reflection on themselves."

"It is a queer trait in woman—a queer trait," reflected Westlake. "Something is radically wrong with them, it seems to me, when they have no pity for their kind. A man will condone the indiscretion, but a woman never. Why is it?"

"And those who have themselves broken over and have not been found out, are the most unforgiving," added Devonshire. "It's mighty queer!"

"It was a mighty kind thing for Pendleton and Burgoyne to do," said Westlake. "I felt like applauding."

"So did I," echoed the others.

"And it doesn't detract a bit from the bravery,

that Pendleton is said at one time to have been in love with Stephanie Mourraille," remarked Smithers.

"It rather increases it—and proves its truth," said Westlake. "As for Burgoyne, he evidently is going to take her as he left her—cut out the interim. However it is, it was a classy thing to do. I shall tell them so."

"I wouldn't," Devonshire advised. "You might say it to Burgoyne but I should be shy of saying it to Pendleton. It is not the sort of praise that will appeal to him, I fancy—it is at the expense of the woman, you know."

"H-u-m!" Westlake reflected. "I hadn't thought of that—but it's a pretty fine spun reason."

"All the same, I wouldn't," was the reply.

Just then a servant delivered a message to Burgoyne and he arose and went into the Club-house.

Mrs. Lorraine, Pendleton, and he had been keeping up a rapid fire of small talk, without a reference to that which was uppermost in their own and everyone's mind. It obtruded itself at every turn of the conversation and everything that was said seemed in some way to hint at it. It was a relief when Burgoyne left—it gave them time to catch their breath, so to speak.

Pendleton drew out his case, selected a cigarette with great deliberation, chose a match from the box on the table in front of him, struck it, and very carefully made a light.

She sat back in her chair and closed her eyes, as

one does who has been subjecting them to strain and needs to rest them. Then the tension of her nerves relaxed a trifle—she opened her eyes, to encounter Pendleton's looking at her questioningly.

"Well?" she said, with her sweet smile. "What—is it?"

"What is what?" he answered.

"What is it that you want to know?" she asked.

"Nothing."

"What is it then I can tell you?"

"Whatever you wish to tell me."

"What would you soonest know? Ask—I am willing that you should. I shall be glad to answer—you."

"I was wondering, Stephanie," he said, after a pause. "I was wondering—why you did it?"

For a little time she did not reply.

"Why I—went off with Garret Amherst, you mean?" she said low.

"Good Lord, no!" he exclaimed. "That is your own affair. I meant why you came to this place of all others in town, this afternoon."

"A fit of bravado," she answered. "I had already done so much that a trifle more didn't matter. Moreover, I was curious to see what"—she made a slight motion of her hand toward the crowd on the piazza—"they would do. I saw!" she added with a bit of a laugh.

"Was it wise to try them all together?" he asked. "Wouldn't it have been better to let them make up

their minds gradually rather than to force them to a decision in a moment?"

"Of course—I know it, but I've been so much a fool lately that I'm reckless—I reckon it is in the blood. My father lost his life climbing mountains, you know. Mine takes a different form, that 's all—I run to the unconventional. Run is a good word, isn't it?" she smiled.

"Yes—particularly the run *back*," said Pendleton.

"You think so?" she demanded.

"I'm sure of it, Stephanie—perfectly sure of it."

"What did I run back to?" she asked.

"Lorraine, if you want him!"

"I don't know that I want him," she shrugged—"and I don't think he'll have me. Harry Lorraine is a weak, vacillating fool—that's why I left him. If he had the strength of a man—just an ordinary man—he could have saved me from Amherst. He would have taken me from him, at any rate; he could have found us at any time. My mother knew where I was—after the first two weeks."

"I thought as much," Pendleton commented.

"He wrote me three letters—at intervals. In the first, he was coming over to kill Amherst on sight."

"He had the right idea."

"Yes—and I'd have blessed him if he had only done it!" she exclaimed. "But instead he sent a second letter casting me off finally. And then another—that whined and plead and threatened and sneered, and ended by leaving me in doubt what he meant to do. I didn't care, of course, but a woman likes to

think of the man she married as strong enough to *do* something in such a crisis. She wants to respect the man she has left, so she can respect the other man more. And they both failed, Montague, they both failed miserably. Lorraine as a husband was poor enough, but Amherst was—beyond words. I came to despise him. You remember one day at Granger's, when I came in with him; and later I asked you how you liked him—you always spoke plainly to me, I think—and you said, 'He is a mongrel—a vicious mongrel'; and I was indignant, and left you abruptly —remember the episode? Well, *I've* remembered it many times—for he has shown it. He *is* a mongrel—a vicious mongrel, Montague. Had Harry Lorraine found us out then and even beaten him, I would have thrown my arms around my husband's neck for very joy. But he didn't. Instead of coming—he wrote! —*wrote!* Instead of descending as an avengeful Jove he indited epistles! Can you imagine anything more ridiculously absurd?"

"No," said Pendleton, "I can't even imagine it—but different men, different minds, and different methods."

"And Amherst was worse," she went on. "I know that you think I ought to have realized it before—I went off. I didn't—until it was too late. He is too immaculate—too nice—too everything. Most men can wear their clothes and be careful about their personal appearance without seeming to be—without obtruding it on their wives or mistresses. Amherst, I soon discovered, could not. That was the

first thing to get on my nerves. Then his—habits began to grow natural and—disgusting. He is only veneered—and the veneer is very thin." She hesitated—flushed. "And he was a—brute.—A miserable brute, Montague—and the break came at last. We had quarrelled, and quarrelled, and quarrelled for months—every time longer and bitterer than the others. That last night it was dreadful, and I ran into another room and locked the door. I would leave him in the morning, I decided. I was at breakfast when he walked in and said:

"'I'm going back to Mrs. Amherst. I advise you to go back to Lorraine, if he will take you. I sail from Cherbourg to-morrow. I have your transportation, if you wish to accompany me to New York.'

"I positively laughed with joy. 'If Mrs. Amherst wants you she is welcome to you, heaven knows!' I answered. 'I'm charmed to be rid of you, nor will I trouble you for the transportation. I prefer henceforth to pay my own way, thank you!'

"He wavered a moment—and hesitated. I ate my rolls and drank my coffee. Then he held out his hand.

"'Good-bye!' he said.

"'Good-bye!' I answered, and nodded as indifferently as I would to a chance acquaintance and just touched his fingers.

"He turned and went out. That is the last time I've seen him. I sailed on the Celtic three days later, and came straight home—to my mother's house, that

is. I told her everything. I have told you, Montague; I owed it to you because of old times, and because you have not forgotten them. It was a brave thing you did, you and Burgoyne—though I fancy that you led off and he only followed after. But to not another shall I ever voluntarily open my lips on this matter."

"That is the wisest course, I think," he approved.

"There is no excuse for my conduct, according to the standards of society," she admitted—"nor shall I attempt to excuse it. My defence is worthless, as a defence. When I left with Amherst I was never coming back. We were to be married as soon as we were free. We thought both the others would divorce us at once. At least that was what *I* thought—and what Amherst *said*. I realize now that it was only a subterfuge with him; he wanted to get me off for a while and try me. It's nice to think, isn't it? And when he had tried me for a few months, he tired of me and tossed me aside like an old toy. I ought to have known that I was simply a new plaything for him, and was to last as long."

"You poor child!" said Pendleton. "Your mistake was in not appraising Amherst at his proper value. He is pure cad; and you didn't know it until—after."

She shook her head.

"He showed me only his nice side," she said. "I thought him the most fascinating, the most gallant, the most dignifiedly handsome man that I had ever met. Did the men know him for a cad?"

"Some of them did."

"Did you?"

He nodded.

"If you had only warned me!" she sighed.

"What good would it have done? You would have scorned advice—resented it. Though I think I would have risked it had I the least notion of whither you were tending."

"I wish you had risked it!" she exclaimed. "It might have made me realize what I was doing. I had no one but Lorraine to depend on."

"You had yourself, Stephanie."

"Myself was the one thing I ought not have had," she replied. "Lorraine should have taken me away—out of temptation. If need be he should have knocked me down with a club like a cave man and dragged me out of Amherst's clutches."

"Again what good would that have done? You would only have panted for Amherst the more, and have gone to him at the first opportunity."

"It would have saved me—and I would have seen Amherst then for what he is—a coward."

He shook his head.

"You think now that you would, but I doubt it," he replied. "No one can say what would have happened, if what did happen hadn't happened. Moreover, while as you know I have little enough respect for Lorraine, yet hadn't he the right to suppose you would do the conventional thing rather than the unconventional? Did he have any cause to suspect you and Amherst?"

"I think not," she admitted—"more than that I

was nice to Amherst; and that, in public, he seemed to be fond of me in a well-bred way. *You* never would have suspected, Montague?" she asked.

"I never gave it a thought; because I considered you—not that sort. The last one, indeed, who would be led into any such foolishness, Stephanie."

"You thought me too calm and cold, doubtless?"

"Not exactly. I thought you too indifferent to men, and much too fond of Society."

"And you didn't know how fascinating Garret Amherst could be—when he wished."

"It's an accomplishment he doesn't waste on men," smiled Pendleton.

"I wonder if he has played his fascinating way with Mrs. Amherst?" she reflected.

"This evening's *Telegraph* says that they have gone to Europe together."

She laughed lightly.

"You see," she said. "He is already rehabilitated. No one blames the man for long. It rather adds to his attractiveness indeed—particularly with the woman. He comes back, and all his clubs receive him; Society blinks its eyes a bit, looks shocked and welcomes him. Yet it raises its hands in horror at me! Society never seems to realize that a woman cannot commit the unpardonable sin alone—a man has got to be her accomplice."

"It's rotten philosophy, Stephanie, but it's the way of the world," he said.

"It's the way of the world and I was aware of

it, you mean," she replied. "Certainly, I knew it before and I know it now—but I didn't think of it at the time. Look at these dear people—pretending not to notice me, yet watching covertly like a cat a mouse. And you're coming in for your share, too, Montague. They are simply perishing from curiosity—to know what we are talking about. They will hold you up to know, when I'm gone."

He smiled and raised his shoulders a trifle.

She knew well that none would venture to mention the matter to him.

"I'm going, now," she said. "Will you escort me down this path of sweet charity flanked by gentle spirits, Mr. Pendleton?"

"I would ask you to dine with me to-night but unfortunately I'm promised to the Emersons—Burgoyne and I."

"They *are* getting on!" she remarked. "Two years ago and they would not have had the nerve to ask *you*. It's the daughter, I suppose?"

"You mean that she is the reason for my dining with them—or the reason for their coming on?" he asked.

"The latter largely, the former possibly," she replied with an amused look.

"Miss Emerson is a very pretty girl," he said.

"Beauty with money is a valuable asset for marriage with some needy scion of the aristocracy," she observed.

"It is not confined to the needy in her case," he replied.

"I beg your pardon, Montague," she apologized.

"Oh, I'm not affected!" he laughed. "Since *you* wouldn't have me, I've retired."

"You never gave me the chance to have you—you never asked me!" she laughed back.

"No—you were too occupied with Lorraine to give me the opportunity to ask you."

"Lorraine?" she inflected contemptuously.

"You didn't say it *that* way *then*," he replied.

"No—I was too blind to see." She arose. "I am going," she said; and went down the crowded piazza with the same contemptuously ignoring smile as at her coming.

As they neared the entrance—the eyes of all whom they had passed upon them, the eyes of all those who were yet before them busy elsewhere—a tall, good-looking young fellow sauntered out from the Club-house and met them, face to face, before the door.

It was Harry Lorraine!

For an instant husband and wife confronted each other—while the onlookers gasped, and gaped, and were silent. Never had they thought to witness such a scene! Even Pendleton hesitated, uncertain what would be Mrs. Lorraine's course. Assuredly it was a most unfortunate contretemps—a trying moment.

She, however, did not seem to mind it in the least—the smile still lingered on her lips as she paused and looked the man, whom she had sworn before God's altar to love and to cleave to, calmly in the face. It was a look of inquiry—is it to be an armed neutrality, or is it to be war?

Then suddenly Lorraine's face changed. His startled surprise vanished—he saw only the woman who had shamed him and disgraced herself; and without a word, either of reproach or of greeting, he turned from her and went back into the house.

A soft rustle passed over the craning throng, growing quickly into a buzzing of whispers and low laughter:—Lorraine had refused even to recognize her!

The next instant the Victoria drew up and Pendleton handed Mrs. Lorraine in.

"That was Harry Lorraine's last chance," she said, as Montague bowed over her hand. "I shall never go back to him now."

III

THE VACILLATOR

LORRAINE, a scowl on his face and wrath in his heart, went slowly down into the café—never seeing whom he passed—and made his way to a secluded table in the darkest corner.

For a time he sat staring at the wall—across his mental vision floated pictures of his courtship and his short married life—of the beautiful woman he had caressed and who had caressed him—whose arms had been around his neck—whose ruddy head had lain on his shoulder—whose lips he had kissed—whose form he had embraced in a fury of tenderness—of the woman who was his wife—who was his wife for yet a little time longer, until the Courts could cut the bond asunder. The uncertainty that had dominated him was ended. He knew his mind *now*—knew whether he loved her still or whether that love was turned to hate. Why had he not known sooner? Why had it taken him so long to realize it? Why had he vacillated like a pendulum—not sure of himself nor of his feelings? Why had he had *any* feeling for her since she had none for him? . . . He laughed—a little, bitter laugh—and turned his face deeper into the shadow. It was not pleasant to contemplate. It had been misery for him every day since that shameful one when he had found her gone—and waiting, dazed and unbelieving, had read the truth in the newspapers—

the horrible, damning truth, that she had given herself to another man.

And now—she had returned; flung aside by the man. Would he receive her! take her back! take someone's else leavings! a dishonored woman—lower than the hired ones who stand for pay, honest in their dishonor.

Had she lost all idea of the fitness of things? Was she dead to every sense of shame that she should thus show herself at the Club—to all the mob—and flaunt her degradation before their very eyes—to their vast enjoyment and bitter tongues? And then to have met him—by accident, it was true; but none the less had she remained in seclusion it would not have happened, and he would not have been compelled to bear the ignominy of that scene, while a staringly curious crowd looked on, laughing slyly and with zest.

It was horrible! horrible! He buried his face in his hands and groaned in spirit. The humiliation of it all pressed down upon him with overwhelming weight. He was ashamed to leave the Club-house—he was ashamed to remain—he was ashamed to be seen—he was ashamed to——

"What's up, old chap?" said a hearty voice beside him. "Can't you put, or have you been guessing wrong in the stock market—like the most of us lately?"

Lorraine looked up to see Steuart Cameron stretch his long length in a chair opposite and draw out his tobacco bag.

"Oh—is that you, Cameron?" said he. "No—that is, I've been feeling a—bit out of sorts the last day or so—stomach, I reckon. Have something?"

"No, thanks—I've cut it out for a month," replied Cameron, neatly rolling a cigarette and licking it. "Do you know," striking a match and holding his head to one side while he deftly applied the flame—"I never before realized how long a month was—it's been a week since yesterday."

"At that rate your month will be over in about four days," Lorraine replied, with a forced laugh.

"That is an idea—I hadn't thought of it," said Cameron.

He had seen the meeting on the piazza and had followed Lorraine down for the purpose of being with him—after a little. He was Lorraine's particular friend, and he knew that presently it would be well for the other to have some one to talk to.

Lorraine relapsed into moody silence. Cameron smoked and rattled ahead, without pausing for answers nor seeming to note their absence.

Occasionally Lorraine stirred himself to throw out a reply, only to fall again, after a moment, into silence. Cameron talked on—with never a word however which could imply that he was waiting for his friend to unburden himself. He was aware that Lorraine must break out to some one—the longer he waited the surer it was, and the less likely that he would choose his confidant. He would go off like a delayed explosion—say things that later he would give much to unsay, and which would be much better un-

said. But the unsaying being impossible, it was best that he should say them to him—who would forget them.

It is not many friends who will voluntarily consent to act as safety valves for the overflow of another's feelings—and then not tell. And Cameron's patience and consideration were at last rewarded.

Lorraine shook himself—as though to get rid of his thoughts—and sat up.

"Cameron," he said, "what shall I do? Stephanie is back—she was here in the Club—just now. I met her on the front piazza—before them all!"

"I know," said Cameron, "I saw it."

Lorraine regarded him thoughtfully.

"And you followed me here so as to—it was mighty good of you, Steuart."

Cameron smiled sympathetically.

"What do you think you want to do?" said he.

Lorraine made a despairing gesture.

"I don't know—except that I shall never take her back," he replied.

"Um—what else is there to decide?" Cameron asked.

"Whether I also shan't kill Amherst!" exclaimed Lorraine.

Cameron shook his head. "It is too late now!"

"Too late for what?"

"To kill him."

"Why?"

"If you've cast off Stephanie, you've let him out."

"*What?*" Lorraine demanded. "*I've let him out?*"

"To my mind, yes. If another man goes off with my wife, I'm not justified in killing him unless I'm ready to take my wife back. If she is worthless it is folly to kill because of her. The killing is for her honor—for having led her astray."

"And is my honor not to be considered?" asked Lorraine vehemently.

"How has your honor been affected?" returned Cameron gently.

"My God!—how hasn't it been affected! Didn't he run away with my wife?"

"He ran away with something that you say you don't want," Cameron pursued.

"That is why I don't want her—because she betrayed me."

"Because she betrayed you may be valid ground for you to kill *her*—it certainly isn't ground for killing *him*."

"Amherst is the man in the case, isn't he?"

"In the case *with her*—and her you have refused to recognize. The ethics of the situation are involved and debatable but I repeat that this much is clear: unless you are willing to take her back, you have no justification nor excuse for killing Amherst."

"As you said before!" Lorraine remarked.

"As I said before—and as I shall say twenty times, if necessary, until you see reason!"

"Suppose I *had* taken her back—what then?"

"Then," said Cameron slowly—"it would depend

on what *she* wanted. Your first duty would be to her."

Lorraine frowned and stared at the table.

"You may be right," he admitted, "but what do you think is my duty to myself under the circumstances?"

"If I were in your place," Cameron answered, "I should first consider whether to take her back——"

"I have considered, I tell you—it is impossible."

"Then I should forget her and everything connected with her. I should turn the case over to my attorneys and go away until the trial. When the divorce is granted, I should resume my old life as if I had never been married."

"And Amherst—what would you do about him?" asked Lorraine.

"I should not think of him. To me, he would not exist."

"You have never been married!" commented Lorraine bitterly. "You cannot know the impulse to violence—the impulse to kill. I want to see him die—to choke him with my own hands—to feel his struggles—his writhings—his gasps—to prolong his agony—to watch his face in the death throes—to feel his last breath—sometimes, that is. At other times, I am indifferent. I don't care what becomes of her or him—nor myself. Why is it, Cameron, why is it?"

"It was the uncertainty—till you've made up your mind what to do," Cameron answered. "But it is over now, old man. You have decided.—Moreover you're likely to have plenty of time to master

your impulse to homicide. Amherst has gone to Europe with Mrs. Amherst. They will likely be gone a long time."

"With Mrs. Amherst!" Lorraine exclaimed. "She has taken him back?"

"So to-night's *Telegraph* says."

"H-u-m—I suppose some people will think I should do that too."

"Many persons, many minds," replied Cameron. "However, it's no one's affairs but your own—so let them all go to the devil."

"It's different with Amherst," Lorraine reflected. "He's not smirched so much."

"So Society thinks."

"What do *you* think?"

"I think it is a question which concerns only the parties interested—so deeply concerns them, indeed, that no one else has any right to an opinion."

"In the abstract, no. But, in the practical, Society's view must be considered—it says the woman's case is very different from the man's—and it may make the husband feel it if he takes her back."

"Not for long—if he has the courage of his conduct, and fights," said Cameron. "However, you are not confronted by any such condition. You've met the situation according to custom. It is up to her now to do the fighting back."

"I'm not concerned for her; she's just a—woman," said Lorraine curtly.

"No—you're not concerned for her," replied Cameron slowly; "not concerned further than every

man is concerned for a woman—that she gets fair play and a square deal."

"I'm perfectly willing for Society even to forget her past, if it wishes," said Lorraine. "I'm not vindictive. I'm indifferent. I'm done with her forever."

"You look at it in the proper spirit, old man," Cameron encouraged. "The time when men took the law into their own hands is past—with one exception, possibly. Your course is dignified, and thoroughly within your rights."

It had been easier than he had anticipated. Lorraine was steadier than he had thought—had borne the meeting with reasonable fortitude, considering the circumstances and the provocation. He leaned over and put his hand on his friend's shoulder.

"Old fellow," he said, "don't misunderstand me—but—don't let your feelings run away with you and say things to others that you will regret. You'll have plenty to try you—plenty to make you forget—plenty to anger you—but don't! don't! Bear in mind that this is an occasion when silence is more than golden."

"I've been fairly steady—don't you think?" Lorraine asked. "I came down here to avoid people—to get away. If I only could get away from myself it would be much better for me. My thoughts are what madden."

"Don't think," advised Cameron—"it may be difficult—but try it."

"I've got to try it—I've nothing else to do," was the bitter answer.

"Good!—you've the right idea!"

"I've been doing little else than thinking for the last year and a half," Lorraine continued. "It's the sight of her that stirs it up afresh, just when I thought it overcome. I tell you, Cameron, you must go through what I've gone through, loving your wife, to understand and appreciate. It is well enough for you and the rest of my friends to caution prudence—to resume the old life—to forget—to choose the expedient way—but try it! only try it!" He brought his fist down on the table. "It will be the damnedest hardest thing you have ever attempted!"

"There is no possible doubt of that, Lorraine," Cameron agreed. "But you're up against a hard proposition—one that tries men's souls, and takes a man to meet and handle. You've handled it with great credit thus far, old chap, and I want to see you handle it so to the end. We're all interested, you know—interested because we're your friends."

"I know you are," said Lorraine. "I appreciate your regard more than I can say. I'm not going to make a scene with—Stephanie; nor do anything to Amherst—if he keeps away from me. This unexpected meeting with her hasn't bereft me of quite all my senses—though it did stagger me for a moment. I'm all right now, Cameron. I'll be strictly conventional, hereafter, never fear."

"I'm not afraid," Cameron smiled. "The fateful moment has passed. You'll be right as a trivet henceforth."

He gave his order to a passing boy, and this time Lorraine joined him.

"Are you staying here for dinner?" Lorraine asked presently.

Cameron nodded. "I'm dining with the Emersons—a sort of a pick-up crowd, I fancy—at least I'm a pick-up. I wasn't asked until about half an hour ago."

"The Emersons sure are coming along," Lorraine remarked. "It's the gold key with them, all right—and they use it on every occasion. I venture they try for Burgoyne—he has just returned from abroad. He is sort of a celebrity, and a near-celebrity is better than nothing."

Cameron smiled and drank his high-ball. He had heard Lorraine holding forth before on the Emersons and their kind.

"Look at the old man there!" Lorraine went on. "He is a good-natured bounder—but he ought to be tending bar in a corner saloon rather than hob-nobbing here. And as for Mrs. Emerson!——"

"How about the daughter?" Cameron inquired.

"Except for her family, Miss Emerson is all right. Only I shouldn't want to marry her—I'd be afraid the children would breed back."

"With grandpa's money, and the present day advantages and forced culture!" laughed Cameron. "I reckon not, my friend, I reckon not."

One of the attendants approached with a telephone instrument and connected it with the wire at the side of the room.

"Some one wants to talk to you, Mr. Lorraine,"

he said, placing the transmitter on the table and handing him the receiver.

"Excuse me, Cameron!" said Lorraine. "Hello!"

. . . . . .

"Yes, this is Mr. Lorraine."

. . . . . .

"This evening—at seven-thirty!"

. . . . . .

"Why—yes—I shall be very glad to!"

. . . . . .

"Not at all—the pleasure is mine, I assure you."

. . . . . .

"Yes—good-bye!"

He put down the receiver and the man took the instrument away.

"I 'm elected!" he remarked.

"To what?"

"To Mrs. Emerson's pick-me-up."

"Why didn't you decline?" Cameron asked.

"Decline! How the devil could I decline—when she held me on the telephone! Damn the telephone, anyway."

"It's the old game!" laughed Cameron. "A man is helpless when a woman gets him there. He would dine with his cook, or take the laundress to the theatre, if she asked him over the telephone."

But to himself he was thinking:

"Mrs. Emerson knows of that scene on the piazza and wants to have the most talked-of man in the Club at her table to-night. She is long for the main chance."

IV

A QUESTION OF FRIENDS

Stephanie Lorraine, choosing a round-about route through the Park, drove slowly homeward—passing on the way numerous acquaintances and erstwhile friends, who, if they were men, looked their surprise and spoke pleasantly; if they were women, pretended not to see her, or, having seen her, either looked away or bowed distantly—very distantly. The more unstable their social position the more distant was the bow.

Just at the exit from the Park, her Victoria was stopped by a sudden congestion in the traffic ahead. Preoccupied, she did not notice it until she heard a voice exclaim:

"Why, Stephanie Lorraine!" Gladys Chamberlain in riding togs and crop was at the curb and holding out her hand in greeting. "You dear girl! How do you do?"

"Pretty fit, thank you," Stephanie smiled.

"When did you get back?"

"Several days ago. I'm at my mother's,—if you care to come around."

"Why *surely* I'll be around, Stephanie—I'd ride back with you now, but I expect to meet my groom here with my mare. Will you be home to-morrow?"

Mrs. Lorraine looked at her intently for an instant.

"Do you appreciate just what you are doing?" she asked.

"Certainly I do—I'm going to visit an old friend —who is a friend still—and always will be, I hope."

Stephanie put out her hand again. "Thank you, Gladys, but I think you ought to know that the Club-house piazza refused to recognize me a few minutes ago."

"I'm not controlled by the Club-house piazza, Stephanie dear," said Miss Chamberlain gently.

"You may be very lonely in your friendship," Stephanie warned. "The only two who spoke to me at the Club were Montague Pendleton and Sheldon Burgoyne—the rest didn't even see me."

"I would bank on Pendleton, and on Burgoyne, too. They are *men*."

"They came to the front of the house to meet me—assisted me from the carriage—escorted me through the crowd to their table—sat with me—and Montague went back with me and put me in the Victoria. It was a brave thing to do—and I told him so."

"How like Montague Pendleton," said Gladys. "And it was brave too of you to go there and beard the old dowagers and tabbies to their very faces. They can't but respect you for it."

"They are more likely to view it as shameless effrontery," Stephanie answered.

"Let them—they are apt to say anything for a time. Then they will hurt themselves playing follow-my-leader—and trying to distance her."

THE OFFENDER

"Who is the leader?" Stephanie smiled.

"Whoever starts first," said Miss Chamberlain contemptuously. "They're all afraid to commence anything unconventional, but when *one* ventures they all break after her, and then it's bally-ho! for the race. You've noticed it, surely?"

"I can't say I have—but then I've not been very observant of the dowagers and the tabbies."

"And of course they like you accordingly. Well, who cares? You didn't have to regard them—before, so why regard them now? They'll come around, Stephanie, never fear. If you make the pace as hot as you seem to have made it this afternoon, they 'll be along in full cry shortly. Wait until some of their men folks have had *their* say—there will likely be another thought coming to them then. I've great faith in the men—they prevent us from becoming cats."

A groom rode up leading a spanking bay mare. Touching his hat he dismounted. Miss Chamberlain swung up lightly astride and gathered the reins.

"Until to-morrow morning then—at eleven?" she asked.

"Whenever it suits you," Stephanie smiled.

"I'll be there on the dot," said Gladys—and with a little laugh and a nod she rode away.

Stephanie continued her drive homeward. The way was pleasanter now—she was not alone—Gladys would stand by her—and with Gladys would come others of her old intimates. The first was the hardest —the rest would follow in time, depending on the

independence of the individual and the extent and force of the opposition. It might take a year for her to be rehabilitated—for Society to white-wash her or to forget—or it might take only a month. At all events, she was going to try it. She would rather enjoy the struggle—enjoy fighting those who were opposed. She always had despised the conventional ones—those who were afraid—those whose God was Society's good opinion, and who worshipped at the altar of commonplaceness and custom. True she was a false wife, branded so all could see; but she knew that, except for the brand, she was not alone. She was in good company; only, the others were ostensibly regular, while she had broken over and had left no room for doubt nor for exercise of a discretionary blindness. She had been honest about it—she had gone away never to come back, she thought. She had staked herself openly and unreservedly before the whole world, with the intention never to seek for restitution. The others staked nothing unless found out—they broke the seventh commandment with impunity, but discreetly and with due regard for the conventions. And the very ones who were breaking, or had broken it, would be the most frigid to her now. She smiled a bit sarcastically. It was the way of the world, and she knew it years ago, so she had nothing to cry over. They also were doing the conventional and the proper—and looking out for themselves. When she had melted the ice around her sufficiently for them to sail up to her without endangering their own crafts in the floe, they would come promptly and

with dispatch. Until then she was aware they would hold off.

When she arrived at home a limousine was standing before the door. Her mother was entertaining a visitor in the piazza-room, and she passed on upstairs.

Presently Mrs. Mourraille entered. She was an older edition of Stephanie, except that her hair was black and her eyes grey—the honest grey that one instinctively trusts and is rarely deceived in. Now they bore the trace of suffering, and her hair was beginning to whiten—had begun during the last year, her intimates observed.

Stephanie arose quickly from the dressing-table, where she had been straightening out her own auburn tresses before the glass, and gliding swiftly over bent and kissed her mother on the cheek.

"Sit here, dearest," she said. "I noticed Mrs. Parsons was with you when I came in, so I didn't stop."

"I saw you," Mrs. Mourraille smiled—"and so did Mrs. Parsons!"

"What did she say?"

"Not a word vocally; but she said many things by her face—chiefly bewilderment and concern."

"Some other faces have shown similarly this afternoon," said Stephanie.

"Did you meet many that you knew on your drive?"

"Yes—I went out to the Country Club—the place was crowded."

"My dear! was it wise?" exclaimed Mrs. Mourraille. "Was it wise, so soon?"

"Judging from the general result, I should say not!" laughed Stephanie. "But it will give them something to talk about the rest of the afternoon, and furnish a topic for dinner. And for that they should be grateful to me."

"My dear!" marvelled her mother.

"Oh, you should have seen the preoccupied air of every woman on the piazza—and there were scores of them there. It was positively chilling."

"Didn't any of them even speak to you?"

"Not one!"

"Who were there?" asked Mrs. Mourraille, her lips tightening.

"Every one in town, I think. It was the regular Saturday afternoon crowd—and then some."

"Did you give them a chance to speak, dear—or did you go haughtily through them, looking neither to right nor to the left?"

"Come to think of it, I went right through them—to a table in the remote corner. However, it made no difference. I might have forced some of them to bow but it would have been a holdup and they would have been justified in taking it out on me afterward. This was the better way. No one can feel hurt—and every one can choose at leisure what she will do."

"Wouldn't it have been wiser to let them choose at leisure, in the first place, rather than to force them to choose quickly, with the chance that they will re-

verse themselves at leisure?" suggested Mrs. Mourraille kindly.

"You mean that I shouldn't have gone to the Club?—possibly. But I wanted to see—and, as I remarked to Montague Pendleton, *I saw*."

"Was Montague with you?" exclaimed Mrs. Mourraille.

"He didn't accompany me—he met me at the Club-house—he and Sheldon Burgoyne." And she explained.

Mrs. Mourraille expressed her appreciation of their actions in praiseful terms—then she asked:

"Were any of my particular friends there?"

"It doesn't matter, mother dear. I won't get you into any snarl any further than I've already drawn you."

"Let me determine how far in I shall go," her mother answered quietly. "I simply want the information now—I'll decide later."

Stephanie named them.

"But you must remember, dear," she appended, "that I didn't give them much opportunity even to show a disposition to recognize me. And more of my own friends were there than of yours—and they didn't show any particular eagerness to speak. I can understand their feelings and position. My advent was like a bomb hurled into the crowd. They chose the safest course, which was to sit still and pretend not to see me. I reckon I'd have done the same had I been one of them. They will all come around in time. Gladys Chamberlain has already led off; the

rest will follow more or less rapidly—according to disposition or their fear of Society's frown."

She talked rapidly, seeking, for her mother's sake, to make light of her position.

And her mother understood, and smiled in indulgent appreciation. She had been averse to Stephanie's going out that afternoon, even for a drive. She never for an instant had thought of her going to the Club. She wanted her to remain passively at home until her coming had ceased to be the latest wonder; until the talk had died down, and people had got used to the new situation and had decided what they would do. It was a case for slow progress and patient waiting. But Stephanie had ever been impulsive, and a trifle headstrong when the notion seized her. Mrs. Mourraille knew what it meant—she herself had been like Stephanie until she had broken her inclinations to the ways of expediency. There was no utility in crying over what was past. No one regretted her daughter's *faux pas* more than she, but the business now was to overcome its results and have her start afresh. Assuredly this episode at the Club was not to her idea of the proper style of campaign.

"It is most unfortunate, Stephanie, most unfortunate!" she observed thoughtfully. "Only one thing could be more unfortunate—for you to have met Harry Lorraine there and have had him deny you before them all."

"Then the most unfortunate has happened," Stephanie replied tranquilly. "My husband did meet

me on the front piazza—and, before them all, he turned his back upon me and walked away."

"The brute!" cried Mrs. Mourraille.

Then her grey eyes half closed in contemplation, and for a little while she was silent.

Stephanie leisurely brushed her hair and waited.

"Do you think he quite realized what he was doing?" Mrs. Mourraille asked presently.

"I don't know," said Stephanie indifferently. "Moreover, it doesn't matter. It finished me with him utterly. I wouldn't go back to him now if he got down on his knees on the spot, and before all of them implored it. I thought I despised him before; now I'm sure of it—and I hate and loath him beside."

She got up, and crossing to her mother sank down on the floor beside her and took her hands.

"Dearest," she said, "It will all come right some time. I'm glad to be free of Harry Lorraine, though I'm sorry I did what I did with Amherst, for your sake—and a little for my own now. But it is done and it cannot be undone; and we're not given, either of us, to crying over milk that's spilt. Let us be glad rather that I'm quit of Amherst without a—drag. . . . It wasn't by any fault of his that I am, however. I don't want you to be made to suffer for my folly. I know you can't escape feeling it, but you must not make my quarrel yours. Let me fight it out alone. I'll go away—take an apartment of my own, where I won't weigh you down by my presence, and make your friends shy of you and your house. I'll——"

"My dear little girl, you'll do nothing of the sort," Mrs. Mourraille broke in, kissing the auburn head. "The milk is spilt, as you say—so let us forget it. You don't want Lorraine, so we'll not consider him. We'll consider you, and the future."

"And you!" whispered Stephanie.

"We won't consider me—except indirectly. Whatever is best for you, dear, is best for me. We will fight this out together."

"You sweet mother!" said Stephanie, drawing the dark head down beside her own. "You shall be in reserve; I'll be on the firing line—and I won't let them get through to you."

Her mother smiled in tender clemency.

"I'll be wherever you want me and whenever," she replied. . . . "We might go away for a time," she suggested.

Stephanie shook her head.

"I'll go if you want very much but it doesn't appeal to me. It will only postpone, by the length of our absence, my restoration to—good standing!" she smiled.

"You wish to stay here?"

"Yes—among my friends—to the end that I may learn who they are."

"You may have some bad quarters-of-an-hour, and receive some shocks beside," her mother cautioned.

"Let them come—I've received enough shocks already to make me *immune*. It will be amusing, diverting, serve to make the time pass more rapidly."

"My child!" said Mrs. Mourraille kindly. "You don't appreciate just what you are saying."

"I do, mother dear, and what it means also. I have to face it, so I may as well get out of it what I can, and meet it with a smile. I may be wrong, but to my mind there is nothing like indifference for such a situation."

"That is the best way to look at it, if you can—but can you? Can you be philosophical under the slights, and snubs, and bitter tongues?"

"I think I can—at least, I mean to try," said Stephanie quietly. "With Gladys Chamberlain and Pendleton and Burgoyne, I'm not alone. They will stand by me—if I don't offend again. . . . And you need not fear, dear," answering her mother's look; "I'm not going to Amherst-it again—with any man."

"Have you seen the afternoon papers?" Mrs. Mourraille asked.

"You mean—about Amherst and Mrs. Amherst? No, but Montague told me of it. It's better so—there is only one of us now for Society to get accustomed to. Moreover, his peace is made, and for him the rest is easy."

"It is always easy for the man," Mrs. Mourraille observed.

"Yes—and I can understand: his sin is not so scarlet—it's not continuing, so to speak. Ended it is ended. We women have got used to the social evil in the man, but we can't get used to it in the woman. The ethics of it are a thing apart—good to theorize over, but it is the practical view that controls and

will control in my case. I realize that I have nothing to hope for from the equitable argument. I'm a woman—I know what to expect from the women. I'm not blaming them. I've no one but myself to blame. Man and woman may be equal before the law where men are the judges, but they are not equal in Society's Court where women are the judges. I shall get small show there, mother dear, small show there! With rare exceptions we women are cruel and bigoted toward our sex, with all the characteristics of cruelty and bigotry on parade." She kissed the elder very fondly. "Now go or I shall not be dressed for dinner." . . . "I suppose," she added, "there won't be any guests."

"Not this evening," her mother answered. "Do you wish me to ask any one—for a time?"

"I wish you to do just as you have always done, *ma mère.* I'll have my dinner in my room whenever I'm *persona non grata* to your guests."

Mrs. Mourraille stopped in the doorway and smiled back at Stephanie.

"My guests will meet my daughter or they won't be my guests," she said quietly.

Stephanie, in the mirror of her dressing-table, threw her a kiss.

"No! no!" she said. "But if you don't mind, you might sometime ask Montague Pendleton and Sheldon Burgoyne."

"Together?"

"N—o!" Stephanie hesitated. "I think I'd rather have them apart; at least I would rather have Montague alone—Sheldon doesn't matter."

V

THE CUT OF ONE'S CLOTHES

THE Emerson pick-up dinner party was a decided success.

Even Pendleton admitted it. As for Burgoyne he was quite enthusiastic—possibly because he sat on Miss Emerson's right. Pendleton was on her left. Lorraine had been taken by the hostess—she was not going to let such an opportunity escape her. Old Emerson was sandwiched between Mrs. Burleston and Mrs. Smithers, and was talking like mad of everything but what he should. His wife could, at intervals, catch portions of his conversation, and she made frantically discreet efforts to flag him, but with no result—either because of the numerous cocktails he had imbibed in the grill, or because he refused to understand. As it was, Mrs. Burleston and Mrs. Smithers, as well as the others near him, were convulsed with merriment as he rattled on, serenely indifferent to his spouse's signals and attempts to distract him.

"Now you see, my dear," he whispered confidentially, leaning over Mrs. Burleston, "it is this way: When me and Sally—Sally was my first wife—was married—we didn't have nary a red—nary a red. She done the cooking and housework, including the washing, and I tended bar for McDivit. You don't remember McDivit, I guess—course not. He

was a fine man—a fine man! He kept the old Baroque House—now the Imperial. And I was such a good bartender and mixed 'em so well, only knocked down ten per cent., instead of twenty-five, like the other fellows, that one day he says to me, says he:

"'Bill, you're a good fellow—I 've been a watchin' you and I think a heap of you. I'm goin' to set you up in business. What would you rather be?'

"'I think,' says I, 'I'd rather be a gentleman.'

"'A gentleman!' says he—and smiled sort of knowing like.

"'Yes, sir!' says I; 'a gentleman—one what makes his living skinning another gentleman—legitimately.'

"'You mean you want to be a lawyer?' says McDivit.

"'Not I,' says I. 'They skin only the leavings. I want to skin the big wad. I want to go into the promoting business—I want to sell something I haven't got to somebody what doesn't want it.'

"'Good!' says McDivit with a twinkle in his eye. 'I'll go you.'

"And he set me up—and I've been going ever since—accumulating. There 's a heap of profit selling something you haven't got—though you have to be a bit nimble to keep within the law. But I've succeeded purty well. Later I got to buying something that some one else wanted before he knew he wanted it—and that's profitable—especially if he wants it bad or has to have it. Why this here Club—I worked it beautiful. It didn't know it wanted the new fifty

acres, till after I knew it—and had bought it. That's how I came to be in the Club, you know—part consideration for the fifty acres. Oh, it's a great game! a great game when you know how to play it, and are lucky. I'm both. I'm worth a million and a quarter and I started with nothing—and I'm the same good fellow I was when I tended bar for Mr. McDivit. Success don't spoil Bill Emerson. No siree!" He paused a moment. "Sally, my first wife, you know, she died soon after I left McDivit, and when success came I married Maria—the present Mrs. Emerson, that is. She made a pretty good strike when she found yours truly, don't you think, my dears?" he ended, grinning broadly.

"I do, indeed, Mr. Emerson!" smiled Mrs. Burleston. "You are a find for any woman."

"So I have often told Maria—when we're exchanging compliments—like married people do, you know. I guess Burleston and you hand each other the same, hey? They don't mean nothin'—just hot air—that's pretty hot however when it first blows out!" he laughed.

"Poor old dad!" said Miss Emerson to Pendleton imperturbably. "He is telling the story of his life. Did you hear him?"

Pendleton shook his head.

"I was engaged otherwise," he replied, looking at her with a smile.

"Which is very good of you—but I'm not sensitive, I realize that every one knows what father is and was—it is not a secret that can be hid. He

started with nothing, either socially or financially, and he has come up to where he is—wherever that is. I'm not ashamed of it, though I will admit I would rather have been born in, than have climbed in. But ours was an honest climb, so to speak. Society saw us climbing, and stood aside and permitted it. We bought our ladder, we bought the right to use it, and we bought our way up the wall and down again on the inside. He also bought my education and polish and helped me to make good. That is my duty—to make good. I've been aware of it for years—since I first began to make friends among the nice girls, indeed. And I'm trying to make good, Mr. Pendleton—I've been trying to make good ever since. It's the business of my life to make a social success, and, with father's fortune as an inheritance, to marry well. . . . You know it—every one knows it— so why dissemble? Moreover, it is a legitimate business for a woman, so why be ashamed?"

She said it in the most casual tones—as though she was commenting on the weather or the latest play. Why dissemble? Why be ashamed? Everyone knew it! There was something refreshing in her candor, in her frank appreciation of the situation, and in her acceptance of it as the immediate problem for her to solve, with but the one solution possible that would spell success. She understood that her entire education had been directed with that end in view, and if she did not attain it she would be a failure.

"There is nothing to be ashamed of," Pendleton assured her.

"Nevertheless you are wondering why I talk this way to you?" she went on. "And I don't know why myself—unless it is my father in me. He has a way, at times, of becoming intimately personal concerning his affairs," with a bit of a smile.

"Your father is a good fellow," said Pendleton, seizing the opportunity to shift the conversation.

"Father is *dear!*" she returned; "a dear, unselfish man—with me, at least. He may set mother on edge by fracturing the conventions, but it never bothers me. He has the inherent right to fracture them—and he does it very naturally!" she laughed. "I love him, and I 'm not ashamed of him either."

"Good girl!" commented Pendleton. "You're not a snob—like the most of the new-rich."

"I try not to be, at all events."

"What do you try not to be, Miss Emerson?" Burgoyne asked, breaking into the talk.

"A snob!" she smiled.

Burgoyne raised his eyebrows.

"Every one is more or less a snob, Miss Emerson; don't you want to be in the fashion?"

"I don't like the fashion," she returned.

"Consider," he said. "Is there a man in this Club-house who doesn't think himself a little better than his fellows by reason of more money, more social position, more popularity, more athletic ability, more brains, more something?"

"I can't answer for the men!" she laughed; "but if you ask me as to the women, I'm afraid I'll have

to plead guilty. We are all snobs, on that basis, Mr. Burgoyne. It's only a matter of degree."

"Everything is a matter of degree," Burgoyne answered, "from the powder on your face to a municipal councilman's venality."

"Is there any powder on my face?" she demanded.

"Altogether impersonal," he assured her.

"But *is* there?—I detest powder!"

"So does every man—if the women only could be made to believe it. If there is one thing that is disgusting, it is a white-washed face. Let them put it on if they must, but let them rub it off—all of it. A shiny nose isn't half as bad as a powder-smeared one."

"Mr. Burgoyne, I must know if there is any powder on my face," she repeated tragically, facing him.

He looked long and carefully—so long and so carefully, indeed, that she dropped her eyes, though she did not turn her head.

"No," he answered. "There isn't a single trace."

"Did it require so long to make sure?" she asked.

"I was looking——"

"Yes—I noticed you looking," she remarked.

"I was looking for—powder. If you think I might be mistaken, I will look again."

"You couldn't be mistaken—after such a critical and prolonged—scrutiny!" she laughed. "And it won't be necessary to look again, sir—just at present."

"Will the 'present' be very long?" he queried, with assumed gravity.

"I cannot tell—it will depend."

"Upon what?"

"Circumstances."

"Of what nature?"

"Of different natures—yours and mine."

"More especially yours, I presume?"

"No—yours, I should say," she replied.

"Why mine?"

"To give you something to guess."

"I'm a poor guesser," he protested.

"I thought as much!" she mocked. "It's a masculine failing, I—understand."

"Say rather it is a faculty distinctly feminine—and raised to the nth degree."

"What are you two talking about?" demanded Pendleton.

"I haven't the slightest idea!" Miss Emerson answered. "Have you, Mr. Burgoyne?"

"If I have, I can't find it."

"Who ever knows what they are talking about at a dinner party?" said Pendleton. "Moreover, who cares? It's all bubbles, usually, that burst the moment they are blown."

"Is it?" asked Miss Emerson, with a significant smile.

"Dinner talk I mean," explained Pendleton. "Occasionally we strike deeper—then it's something else than bubbles."

"How do you distinguish?" Burgoyne asked.

"Most people don't, my friend—hence the bubbles."

"Precisely—you're one of the don'ts," said Pendleton.

"Which being the case, let us change to something more entertaining than bubbles," Burgoyne retorted. "I'll take Miss Emerson, and you amuse yourself for a space with your left-hand opponent."

. . . . . .

"What do you think of Miss Emerson?" Pendleton asked when, several hours later, he and Burgoyne sat smoking on the terrace.

"I should say she is a thoroughbred—if it were not for her parents. She has all the characteristics of the well-born—except that she isn't. It must be a sore trial to the girl always to have mother and father to contend against."

"Possibly she doesn't consider it," observed Pendleton. "Possibly she accepts the condition and makes the best of it. I've never noticed that she seemed to feel it in the least."

"Which makes her all the more thoroughbred," Burgoyne declared.

The other nodded. "Just so—and what is more, I've yet to hear her retail scandal or malicious gossip, criticise her friends or acquaintances, or question their motives. Pretty remarkable in a woman, Sheldon."

"Exceptional, indeed," Burgoyne agreed. "But it comports with her presence. She is an exceptional

looking girl. Her *tout ensemble* is wonderfully attractive—to me, at least."

"You're not the only one to observe it, my friend, as I think I told you. Ask Devereux, if you doubt. He says every blithering idiot in the Club is hot foot after her—himself included. Are you going to get in the running also?"

"There appears to be too much competition—the pace is too fast for me. Why haven't you been in it yourself?"

"For the same reason—and one other: I'm too old," Pendleton chuckled amiably.

"Poor chap!" Burgoyne observed. "Who would ever have thought it to look at you!"

"Age is as one feels," said Pendleton. "I feel sixty—therefore I'm not chasing after the petticoats. I leave that for those younger in years and spirit. I am content to stand back and look on—to sniff the battle from afar, like the old war horse."

"Who always has another battle in him," rejoined Burgoyne. "However, I would be quite satisfied to have you look on were I a contestant. The Honorable Montague Pendleton is, I fancy, a dangerous rival for any woman's affections."

"It would seem so!" laughed Pendleton.

"I mean, if you should care to be a rival."

"Thanks, that is better—one likes to fancy himself the very devil with the women, even when he knows he isn't."

"What is Stephanie Lorraine going to do?" Burgoyne asked presently.

"You mean after this afternoon?" said Pendleton. "I do not know. I fancy she doesn't know either. The meeting with Lorraine was most unfortunate, if she sought reconciliation."

"Yes; but if she didn't, it doesn't matter in the least—aside from its giving the mob fresh food for talk."

"I didn't hear anything said at our table!" smiled Burgoyne.

"Hardly!" said Pendleton. "Mrs. Emerson chose to have the sensational guest in preference to the sensation. In deference to Lorraine and ourselves everyone refrained from mentioning what was uppermost in their minds. They have made up for it since, you may be sure."

"I think I shall go around to-morrow and call on Stephanie," Burgoyne announced.

"Do it, Sheldon—she's going to need all the friends she has—most of the women will side with Lorraine, you know."

"That is what makes me so strong the other way," declared Burgoyne.

"Added to the fact that you're not married. If you had a wife to consult, the chances are you would either think differently—or not think. The unfortunate thing is, the men will have little or nothing to say about it. It is the women that Stephanie has to placate, and she has anything but a rosy path cut out for her, I'm afraid. We men don't understand woman—we never have understood her and we never shall. We see only the surface of her nature—

that is all she ever permits us to see—and it is very pleasant to look upon. Under the surface, however, is hidden a fund of petty meannesses, which she reserves exclusively for her own sex. She knows better than to vent them on us—we wouldn't tolerate it for a moment."

"Are you speaking generally or with specific reference to Stephanie Lorraine?" queried Burgoyne.

"Both. It is a general proposition applied to a specific instance."

"Aren't you a bit hard on the women?" Burgoyne asked.

"I think not—but I don't ask you to believe me. If you're happier not to believe, all right. Every man to his experience and what it teaches him."

"Has your *experience* taught you any such doctrine?"

"My experience, together with my observation, has taught me all of that and much more. The trouble is I don't follow it. I can't withstand the feminine fascination and charm—nor my fondness for their society and so on. I'm a good deal like the fellow who couldn't resist the alluringly beautiful color of the red-hot iron and grabbed it with bare hands instead of with tongs."

"You advise me, then, to go after Miss Emerson with tongs?" laughed Burgoyne.

"I decline to advise you—you're quite of sufficient age to advise yourself," Pendleton responded.

"To return to Mrs. Lorraine," said Burgoyne.

"The women didn't manifest much charity this afternoon, I must admit. They were as cold as the proverbial ice water."

"Yes—'seeing they see not'—as some one has it."

"And until they or some of them will consent to see, I fear that Stephanie will be very lonely."

Pendleton nodded. "It might have been better if she had remained abroad for a year or two—till the thing died down. Now it will depend on Stephanie herself whether she can force Society's hand."

"Is that her idea, do you think—to force Society's hand?"

"I don't know that she has formed any idea. She has been home only a day or two, you must remember."

"Judging from this afternoon—I should say she hasn't," remarked Burgoyne. "To come to the Club was about the wildest thing she could have done—and then, as a climax, to meet Lorraine right in the centre of the spot light! He seems to have known *his* mind when it came to the pinch. I understand he gave her his back."

"He did. So far as they two are concerned the decision is made finally," Pendleton replied. "The last hope of a reconciliation is past."

An hour later, when the piazza was almost deserted, two men came from the house and sat down some little distance away from the quiet corner where Pendleton and Burgoyne still lingered.

"Who are they?" said Burgoyne.

"Porshinger and Murchison," Pendleton replied—

"both new ones, also, since you've been gone. They are long on money but short on breeding and manners."

"How did they get in?"

"Climbed in some way—otherwise bought their way in. Porshinger is a capitalist, who capitalized some of the Board of Governors; and Murchison is a big broker who gave a couple of them tips that eventuated. *Voilà!*"

"They are bounders, I suppose—like Emerson?"

"Of a different kind. Emerson is a good sort—these fellows are bounders of the offensive type. Emerson wants to be a gentleman and tries to be one—Porshinger *et al.* neither wants to be nor tries. It is a great thing, now-a-days, being one of the Governors of a fashionable club—when the new rich are climbing upward on the golden ladder. Many impoverished fortunes have been restored, even to affluence, by prospective candidates for admission."

"Has it come to be so bad as that?" said Burgoyne astonished.

"It has. Within the last two years there have been at least a score of candidates elected to membership in this and other fashionable clubs who have bought their election by before-and-after favors to certain members of the Boards."

"What are we coming to?" Burgoyne exclaimed.

"The aristocracy of dollars. In a few years those of moderate means, like ourselves, will be rooted out of our place by the gold hogs. They will make it

so expensive that we cannot belong. Already the old families are beginning to drop out because of the cost: the doubled dues—the higher priced card—the increased style of doing even the simplest things—and, if they have wives or daughters or both, the elaborate dressing that is necessary if they want them to look even half decent and to be asked anywhere. They can't afford to keep up the pace. So there's nothing to do but to drop out. Our time is coming, Burgoyne—we may last longer because we have no feminine appendages, but our limit will be reached, also—it is only a question of a very little longer."

"Well, we shall be in good company at all events!" laughed Burgoyne.

"Yes, that is the recompense," commented Pendleton. "But it riles me to go down before these contemptible crowders-out, like the two yonder."

Burgoyne did not respond immediately and Porshinger's harsh voice came floating over.

"Did you see the Lorraine episode this afternoon?" he chuckled. "She came *here*—actually had the audacity to come here—and she bumped into Lorraine right there on the piazza—and he gave her the frozen face *hard*. It was great."

"Just what Lorraine should have done," Murchison replied. "It's an infernal shame that our wives and daughters should be subjected to such effrontery. The woman has about as much idea of decency as a professional of the street—to come still warm from Amherst's arms and flaunt herself before them all.

I should have thought the little shame she has left would have held her from this last atrocity."

"She's a mighty good looker all right!" the other remarked. "I don't blame Amherst—not in the least."

"Sure—she's a screamer—the tall, willowy sort—Kipling's vampire kind, you know the style?" Porshinger laughed. "I wonder who will be the next one. I should not much mind taking a flyer at her myself."

Pendleton pushed back his chair sharply and got up.

"Come along," he said to Burgoyne. "I may need your help."

He drew out his gloves and crossed the piazza to the two men.

"Well, you have the requisite amount in your clothes," Murchison was saying. "But I fancy you'll have to move fast if you want to stand any chance."

"Why?"

"Because she has——"

The rest of the remark was cut short by Pendleton's gloves falling with a snap across Porshinger's mouth.

"What the devil!" cried he, sitting up.

Crack! Again the gloves came down, and a button marked the skin of the cheek till the blood oozed out.

"I don't like the cut of your coat, Mr. Porshinger!" said Pendleton. "And just because I don't like it I'm going to give you a thrashing. Stand up

and defend yourself. I don't want to hit even a cur when he's down."

"What in hell do you mean?" Porshinger shouted. "I've got no quarrel with you, Pendleton! What in hell do I care whether you like the cut of my coat or not—I'm no tailor."

"Aren't you? I thought you were—I apologize to the tailors," said Pendleton easily. "Put up your hands, you dirty scoundrel, or haven't you a single spark of courage in you?"

"I don't understand you!" protested Porshinger, edging away. "What have I done to you, Pendleton?"

"I've told you I don't like the cut of your coat," was the answer. "Put up your hands, if you don't want me to take my stick to you."

"The man must have lost his mind! Mr. Burgoyne, can't you do something?" Porshinger cried, retreating until his back was against the railing.

For answer, Pendleton's left shot out and tapped Porshinger lightly on the nose.

"Put up your hands," said he, and tapped him again.

Murchison sprang between them.

"Stop!" he cried. "What do you mean, Pendleton?"

"I've already answered that question several times," Pendleton replied. "Sheldon, will you be kind enough to take charge of Mr. Murchison?"

"Come to think of it I don't like the cut of your

coat either, Mr. Murchison," said Burgoyne. "Oblige me by standing aside."

"What's the matter with you damn fools?" demanded Murchison. "Are you trying to pick a fight?"

"Yes," said Pendleton quietly, "but we are meeting with very poor success;" and he tapped Porshinger a third time—and harder.

"Well, if that's what you're after we'll accommodate you!" exclaimed Murchison. "Porshinger, let's give them what's coming to them"—and picking up a chair he let it drive at Burgoyne's head.

The next few minutes were very busy for all parties concerned—and when the astonished servants, attracted by the noise of overturning tables and shifting feet, hurried to the scene, Porshinger and Murchison were bearing their contusions down to the wash-room, while Pendleton and Burgoyne, without a scratch upon them—except for abraded knuckles—were in their chairs and smoking peacefully.

"What was it all about—why did they start the rough house?" Porshinger demanded, while they were repairing the damages.

"Don't you know?" asked Murchison.

"If I knew I wouldn't have asked you!" the other retorted.

"They overheard our talk about Mrs. Lorraine and resented it, I think," said Murchison.

"Hell! I might have known—Pendleton and Burgoyne met her when she came here this afternoon.

Well, I fancy we can square off with them; Mrs. Lorraine is a pretty fair target—and Pendleton is not invulnerable to those who know how to reach him."

"You would better let Pendleton alone," cautioned Murchison.

"What! I think not. I'm not that sort. He started the fight so I'm going to accommodate him. Didn't like the cut of our coats, didn't they? What the devil did they mean by that—what's our clothes got to do with starting a rough-house?" he reiterated. "I don't understand—they didn't mention the Lorraine woman's name!"

"No, that is just it!" Murchison remarked. "They didn't mention her name; they chose some fool pretext for a quarrel so as not to mix her up with it. I've read of the thing, but I've never seen it before. Pretty neat dodge: I don't like the cut of your coat, or whiskers, or cravat, or trousers—so I'll knock your infernal block off. Biff! And the lady's name never mentioned! It's damn neat."

Porshinger looked at him in disgust.

"Why don't you go and tell them so!" he sneered. "They'll likely be courteous and biff you again."

"Probably they would," admitted Murchison good-naturedly.

"I didn't know they were so handy with their fists," Porshinger growled—he was bathing an eye in cold water.

"Maybe we were only particularly unhandy with ours," the other remarked. "At any rate, they're better than us, all right."

"Better at the fist-game, yes," retorted Porshinger. "We'll see now if they're better at some other games, damn them."

"Better forget it—and hold our tongues," Murchison advised again.

"Forget it? Not me! I never forget an injury—and I usually square off my debts. See!"

VI

ON THE BRIDLE-PATH

THE talk which Stephanie and Gladys Chamberlain had the following morning was prolonged into the after luncheon hours.

It was an intimate, personal conference, wherein Stephanie recounted every material incident of the Amherst affair. She told her friend all, freely and without reserve: how the affair started; how it progressed; of Lorraine's indifference or blindness; how it culminated; where she and Amherst went; what they did; how they avoided their acquaintances; how she grew to hate Amherst; his brutalities and meannesses; their slow rupture; the final break; the return, with the episode of yesterday on the Club-house piazza, and her husband's refusal even to recognize her.

"He wasn't altogether accountable, I fancy," said Gladys kindly. "He has had his trials too, Stephanie, you must remember."

"I do remember—or I try to," Stephanie replied; "but I can never forget his conduct or his want of conduct—his stupidity and want of sight. He could have saved me, and he *didn't*."

"Would you have given up Amherst, if Harry had demanded it of you?"

"Yes—if he had *demanded it like a man*. If he had thrashed Amherst within an inch of his life, I think I should have adored him."

"Instead, he did the usual thing—thought that his wife could be trusted, or he didn't perceive. In either of which events, I don't see that he is much to blame. Give Henry Lorraine his due, dear. He isn't much of a character possibly; he is irresolute and hesitating despite his size and appearance. Yet I had hoped that you would make it up—for your sake."

"For my sake!" marvelled Stephanie.

"It's a lot easier, you know," Gladys nodded, "to resume the old life, than to cut out a new one—now."

"Perhaps so—but how long would the reconciliation last?"

"Long enough for Society to forget the past. If the husband forgives, who else may say a word?"

"It may be the way of expediency; it is not my way," answered Stephanie. "However, if Harry Lorraine had made the slightest sign of forgiveness—of recognition when he saw me—even if he had but bowed, it might be different. Now, I am done with him forever."

"Don't you think you put him to a rather hard test?" asked Gladys. "Without a word of warning you encountered him on the Club-house piazza, before the assembled mob, and he—failed. Could you expect anything else from one of his character?"

"Possibly not," admitted Stephanie, as she daintily flicked the ash from her tiny cigarette. "He is true to type, and it is the type to which I object. Between taking him back (assuming that he would have me back) or fighting it out alone, I much prefer

to fight it out alone. It may require longer, but it hasn't the drag. . . . I had thought of going elsewhere, but that will only postpone the struggle a little while and will make it all the harder when it comes—for sooner or later they are sure to find me out. I even considered changing my name—that, too, has innumerable obstacles, with the necessity of living a lie and the constant fear of being detected." She flung her cigarette out of the window and flexed her silken knees under her. "So, on the whole, I thought it better to return and fight. I can down it soonest, if at all, at my home; and then it will stay down. I have a nasty thing to confront. I've been all kinds of a fool, and no one realizes it more than myself; but I'm not going to be weighted down with Harry Lorraine, nor to sacrifice myself again for him—no not even for a little while, not even for my rehabilitation. He didn't save me when he might, and I'm not going to give him another chance. I prefer to make my way alone without any aid from him."

"Without any aid from him, possibly, but not *alone,*" Gladys replied. "Some of your friends are standing by you, and more will follow—many more, I hope, and soon. I shall ask Margaret Middleton, Arabella Rutledge, Helen Burleston, and Sophia Westlake to lunch with us Tuesday. They will do as a starter, I think."

"My dear Gladys!" Stephanie exclaimed, "I don't deserve such friendship as yours. I am——"

The other interrupted her with a gesture.

"You are Stephanie Mourraille to me—no mat-

ter what you did or may do. Isn't that enough? So let us forget it."

"I can't forget it, dear," Stephanie answered.

"Well, you can make a bluff at it!" Gladys laughed, as she arose to go. "I'll telephone you to-morrow about the luncheon, unless I see you before then. What are you doing to-morrow morning?"

"I've nothing to do," said Stephanie. "I'm not pressed with engagements as yet."

"I hope not—I want mine to be the first," Gladys returned easily. "I'll be at home all morning so if you can come over you'll find me in."

"Do you quite appreciate what you're about to do?" Stephanie protested.

Gladys stopped and looked at her thoughtfully a moment.

"Stephanie," said she, "if you are going to play this hand through you must not think for your friends. Let them think for you, and act as they see fit—and don't you be bothering about what is *past.*"

"I'm *not* bothering—except for my friends," was the answer.

"And your friends are amply able to look out for themselves. They are not obligated to do anything for you unless they choose. You just sit tight in the saddle and give the mare her head—above all, don't fret her. You understand."

"I understand," said Stephanie, "but I fear I'll do nothing but fret them, so to speak—at least for a time. Under the circumstances, I'm rather a weight

to carry, especially when the going is apt to be both rough and heavy."

"You can never tell what the going is until you ride it," said Gladys heartily. "Sometimes the field worse on the surface is the best underneath."

After Gladys had gone, Stephanie grew restless. She tried to read, but she could not keep her mind on even the print; as for the story, it made no more impression on her than a passing carriage. . . . Presently she laid the book aside and tried to sleep. . . . It was futile also—more futile even than the attempt to read. . . . Finally the restlessness became unbearable in the quiet of the house. She sprang up; she would go out—maybe the soft spring air and the out-of-doors would calm her. She wanted to go—go—go! To do something. . . .

She dressed hurriedly—putting on a quiet street-suit with a small hat, and a white veil to conceal her face from the casual passer-by. As she passed her mother's door Mrs. Mourraille saw her.

"I'm going out for a walk," Stephanie said in answer to the look of polite inquiry. "I must do something—I'm as nervous as a filly."

"It will do you good," replied Mrs. Mourraille. "Do you wish me to go with you?"

"If you don't mind, *ma mère*, I think I can walk off better alone—you understand?"

"Perfectly, my dear," her mother smiled. "We understand each other, I hope," as Stephanie bent and kissed her.

Once on the Avenue and swinging along at rapid

pace, Stephanie felt better—the restlessness was having vent.

It was Sunday and the people she passed were mainly of the working class. They were out for an airing on the only day of the week that permitted. Occasionally she encountered some one whom she knew, but the veil was excuse for neither seeing them, nor noticing that they saw—if they did. Now and then, some man would stare impertinently at her; but it lasted only for the instant. She was passing, and she did not mind—for there again the veil was her protection, though she knew that, like enough, the veil was the reason or the excuse for the stare.

She reached the entrance to the Park and turned in, choosing presently a bridle-path that took off from the main drive. It was retired and quiet, and ran amid the great trees from which vines hung in huge festoons of verdure. The path was soft and in fine condition, and on the turf that bordered it the foot fell without sound or shock. Overhead the birds whistled and sang, the wind played lightly among the leaves through which the sun penetrated timidly as though uncertain of its welcome.

After a mile or two she unconsciously hummed a song, and realized it only when it ended and the break came. She smiled to herself, and began to whistle softly one of the airs from *In a Persian Garden.* When it was finished, she whistled it again.

Presently she came to a rustic seat—a plank between two trees. She had walked now for more than an hour and the cool shade and the quiet spot appealed

to her. She sat down and undid her veil. She would stay a moment and rest her eyes—the white mesh had been more than usually severe under the glint of the light through the foliage. Not a soul had passed her since she had entered on the bridle-path. The noise of the city was very distant—she could scarcely hear it. At intervals came the faint clang of a gong, the whistle of a locomotive, the exhaust of an automobile on an up-grade.

She did not see the man who, his horse's bridle rein over his arm, rounded the turn and came slowly toward her. Her back was toward them and on the soft path the steps of the horse were almost without noise.

When she did hear them and, startled, swung suddenly around, it was to come face to face with Harry Lorraine.

The recognition was mutual and simultaneous.

He stopped and surveyed her with scrutinizing glance—a bit of a frown furrowed between the eyes, the eyes themselves half closed.

She regarded him with a look as impersonally indifferent as though he were the most casual stranger, then shifted it with interest to his horse.

"So!" he said, after a moment's steady stare. "You have returned—after your paramour has cast you off. Whom do you wait for now, I wonder?"

The cold insult of the words were more than she could endure.

"Not you, at all events!" she retorted.

He laughed mirthlessly—a hollow, mocking laugh that seemed to wrench his very soul.

"No, not me," he answered—"even *your* effrontery would hesitate at the same victim twice."

She shrugged her shoulders and made no reply.

He waited, while the horse drew over and began to crop the grass at her feet. At length, he spoke again.

"What do you intend to do, Mrs. Lorraine—have you come back with the purpose of driving some bargain with me—a bargain that will leave you a trifling semblance of your good name?"

A slight smile curled her lovely lips but she made no answer.

"Because, if you have," he went on, "I warn you that it will be unavailing."

The idea of his warning her of anything now, after the way he had stood back and let her drift upon the rocks, was so intensely absurd that she laughed.

"*You* would warn me!" she inflected. "Warn me!" and she laughed again. "Do you think you are capable of warning any one?"

He saw her meaning and his face grew pale with anger.

"You think that I might have warned you before?" he broke out. "Yes, I might——"

"And you did not!" she interrupted. "Therefore you are a contemptible knave not to have saved your own wife."

"I might have warned you," he repeated slowly,

"if I had suspected you were in danger of forgetting your marriage vows."

"Then you were a fool for not realizing it.—*You* had plenty of warning."

"Plenty of warning, yes—in the light of the after events. But no warning whatever on the basis of trust and confidence. I never thought of your being *crooked*, until you proved it before all the world."

"Just so!" she exclaimed. "I proved it before all the world—which think you is worse: the woman who does, or the husband who through blindness or indifference suffers another man to rob him of his wife before his very eyes?"

"The wife who is worthless is never missed!" he retorted.

"Then what quarrel have you for my going?" she demanded, "more than hurt vanity?"

"It's not your going—it's your coming back that irritates me."

"Irritates!" she laughed. "I am sorry to have irritated you—sorry to have irritated one so childish. It may affect your mind, Mr. Lorraine."

"If my mind has survived the last two years, I think it can survive a trifle more. Nevertheless," he sneered, "I am deeply sensible of the consideration you would show me."

"What are you going to do about it?" she asked sharply.

"I don't quite follow your train of thought," he answered.

"Of course not—it was dreadfully involved," she

mocked. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Lorraine. I meant what are you going to do now that I *have* returned —divorce me?"

"Yes—divorce you," he answered bluntly.

"And without delay?"

"As quickly as the Courts can cut us asunder."

"I am glad," she said. "I rather feared you might make overtures for a reconciliation."

"A reconciliation?" he exclaimed incredulously.

She nodded. "You seem uncertain of your own mind—your letters, you know, were rather childish and vacillating."

"I know my own mind now, thank God," he answered, his voice tense. "If I didn't know it before, it was because your beauty had befuddled it into imbecility. Oh! you may smile, with all the assumed credulity you can muster, but nevertheless you know in your own heart that I speak the truth. I *did* love you—loved every part of you, from your glorious hair to your slender arched feet. Loved your proud, cold face, that can glow warm enough upon occasion —I've seen it glow for me—and often; and your lips that were made for kisses—and your arms—and your flawless shoulders, white as marble, and soft as——"

Her derisive laugh broke in on him.

"Be careful, sir, or the recollection of my charms may cause you to change your mind *again*," she cautioned.

For a space he was silent. And she was silent, too—waiting.

At last he spoke, slowly and deliberately.

"No," he said; "the time when you held me by a smile and a nod has passed. You are just as beautiful, just as alluring, but your body is soiled with the touch of another's hands. Your lips, your hair, your arms, your shoulders—everything—have all been defiled by Amherst's caresses, and by yours."

"Am I then so polluted?" she queried. "At least," slowly stretching out her lithe limbs and looking herself over, "I see no trace of it—neither do I feel it in me."

"Your honor is not sufficiently developed to feel it, there's the pity," he answered. "You will catch another man with the same indifference you forsook me, or were yourself forsaken by Amherst. And your basilisktic beauty will be fatal alike to them and to you."

"Are you a prophet?" she asked.

"One does not need to be a prophet to foresee the apparent," he retorted.

She laughed pityingly.

"You had me unpolluted—why did you not keep me so?" she asked. "I was yours, why did you not hold me fast? You could had you tried. If I am as beautiful as you would have me believe, you were not alone in knowing it. Therefore it was for you to guard me; you were my husband—and you did not. Hence you are either faithless or incompetent, so you have only yourself to blame."

"A naturally good woman doesn't have to be guarded," he sneered.

"Which shows how little—how very little—you

know!" she smiled. "You are scarcely fit to be out of the nursery, Harry—you need a guardian, not a wife."

"The Divorce Court at least will relieve me of the wife," he retorted—"and I shall not want another very soon."

"I trust not," she replied.

Two horses trotted quickly around the bend—their riders rising and falling in perfect time. An amused smile broke over Stephanie's face when she recognized Helen Burleston and Devonshire. As they flashed by, the former nodded pleasantly, the latter raised his hat. Their surprised looks, however, were not concealed—nor Lorraine's embarrassed acknowledgment.

"We are creating a scandal—a fearful scandal!" Stephanie laughed. "Husband and wife, about to be divorced, have been caught talking together in a secluded bridle-path in the Park. What can it mean?"

"It can mean anything their imagination may suggest—except the truth!" exclaimed Lorraine. "No one will ever believe it is a chance encounter."

"Thanks," said she. "You do me that much credit, at least."

"Yes; I fancy I may truthfully assume that this meeting is unpremeditated on your part as well as on mine—though you doubtless are expecting some one," he sneered. "Else why are you here?"

"For *once* you do me an injustice," she replied ironically.

"The circumstances speak for themselves—a se-

cluded by-path, unfrequented on Sunday afternoons, especially by pedestrians—the thick veil which you have just laid aside, doubtless to prepare for the greeting."

"All of which you know perfectly well is not the truth!" she laughed.

He answered with an expressive shrug.

"It is not the way of those with whom you intimate that I properly belong, to appoint a rendezvous for such a place," she remarked.

"Their ways differ—this is your way. You are rather—unconventional, you know."

"Have it as you will," said she indifferently; "though, if you are correct in your assumption, don't you think the man is very laggard at the tryst?"

"Or you are early!" he cut in. "Ah! perhaps he comes!" as the canter of a horse was heard around the bend.

A moment later, Montague Pendleton came in sight.

Instantly the occurrence of yesterday at the Club —Pendleton's pre-nuptial admiration, together with the rumors current at that time, flashed to his mind. He leaned forward and bent his eyes on Stephanie's face—to meet her amusing glance.

"Perhaps he *does* come!" he said. "Perhaps I am *de trop*."

"Then why don't you go?" she asked indifferently.

It was like a blow in the face—and it angered as a blow—sharply, hotly.

He took a step toward her—recovered himself—

stopped—glared at her an instant—then faced Pendleton, who was just at hand, and motioned for him to stop.

Instantly Pendleton drew rein and dismounted. His surprise he concealed under the well-bred air of courteous greeting.

"What does it mean?" he thought. "Have they become reconciled—is it a chance meeting—has Stephanie reconsidered—has Lorraine made his peace for the affront of yesterday?"

One glance at Lorraine's face, however, answered him. There had been no reconciliation—no peace made; rather had the breach widened, if that were possible. He put his arm through his bridle-rein, and coming forward took Stephanie's hand and pressed it meaningly—and got an answering pressure back. Then he nodded pleasantly to Lorraine.

"You will pardon me for intruding!" Lorraine exclaimed. "I didn't realize, until a moment ago, that Mrs. Lorraine had an appointment here with you."

Pendleton understood a little now—and he turned to Stephanie with a politely interrogating air.

"Mr. Lorraine seems to be laboring under some excitement, Stephanie," he said, "may I ask you to explain—if you think it worth while. I'll not misunderstand, however, if you do not."

"Mr. Lorraine does me the honor to think that I have an appointment to meet you here—and that he has discovered us," she answered, unperturbed.

"Is that what you mean, Lorraine?" Pendleton inquired.

"That is exactly what I mean," he burst out. "Else why do I find her here and waiting—and why do you come?"

"Don't be foolish, Lorraine," said Pendleton kindly.—"You don't mean that—you're overwrought and nervous——"

"I'm not overwrought nor nervous!" Lorraine exclaimed. "And neither am I foolish any longer. I *was* blind *once*, but I'm not blind now. Amherst's gone—and you're substituted."

Pendleton looked at him doubtfully—was it hurt pride or just plain jealousy? He could not determine. Stephanie *had* lost Amherst; but she had come back and Lorraine had denied her—and yet, here he was positively shaking with rage, because he thought he had surprised her in a rendezvous with another man. He had cast her off before all the world, and yet he wanted still to dictate as to what she did!

Pendleton glanced at Stephanie; she flashed him a smile, and shook her head not to become involved in a quarrel.

"Well, what have you to say?" sputtered Lorraine.

"Before I answer," returned Pendleton calmly, "I would like to know by what right you ask?"

"By what right I ask! By what right do you think I ask. Isn't she still my wife?"

"She is your *wife*—but you have lost all right to supervise her actions. She is free of you—absolutely

free. You made her free on the Club-house piazza yesterday. You have no more authority over her than any other man—you have less, indeed, for you renounced even that when you disowned her and cast her adrift."

"So long as she bears my name, she shall not trail it in the mire in this town by a vulgar, public assignation, if I can prevent it. I have cause enough without that disgrace!" Lorraine declared. "Until the Courts have divorced us she shall be decent, ostensibly at least—afterward I don't care what she does nor when."

Pendleton frowned.

"That is discourteously blunt language, Lorraine," he replied.

"It is not the time nor the *occasion* to mince words," Lorraine retorted. "You are here by prearrangement and——"

"That is a lie—and you know it's a lie," Pendleton answered.

"In the light of *her* past or of yours?" was the sneering question.

Pendleton hesitated what to answer. The man was plainly laboring under intense excitement. His hands were trembling, his face was flushed, he was beating a tatoo on his boot with his crop.

Suddenly Stephanie spoke. She had remained sitting down until now.

"I think it is better that I should continue my walk," she remarked. "You men are not apt to come to an understanding, so let us go our respective ways. Mr. Pendleton, I thank you more than I can

say—and I shall be glad to see you at my home any time you choose to call. I shall wait until you both are gone."

"Come, Lorraine!" Pendleton laughed good-naturedly. "We will go together."

On Stephanie's account he was willing to do anything to get him off.

"No—we will *not* go together," Lorraine replied curtly, ignoring the other's friendly tones and manner. "You'll go first, and I'll follow to see that you don't come back."

His bearing was quite as insulting as his words, but Pendleton did not seem to notice. It was the indulgent man and the complaining boy.

And Stephanie understood and gave Pendleton a quick glance of appreciation. He was trying to save her from further annoyance, she knew, and she loved him for it, but she had endured so much the last two years that she was hardened to a callous indifference. Once she would have been shamed to the earth by Lorraine's accusation; now it made no impression on her—she simply shrugged it aside. Indeed, she found herself studying its revelations as to her husband's character, and pitying him for this exposition of his weakness and vacillation.

"Perhaps I would better go first since Mr. Lorraine is so exacting and distrustful of a *friend*," she interposed. "Good-bye, Montague," giving him her hand; "I seem to be unfortunate lately with all who are disposed to be nice to me. It won't always be so, I hope; I am not all bad!" she smiled.

And with never a look at Lorraine, she passed in front of him and went down the path toward town.

Lorraine watched her go—and Pendleton watched Lorraine. When she had passed around the bend, the former turned slowly and encountered the latter's eyes.

"Pendleton," said he impulsively, "I apologize! I didn't mean it—I think I'm crazy—I must be crazy. Won't you shake hands with me?"

"Of course I will, Lorraine," Pendleton replied. "And you don't need to apologize to *me*—apologize to Stephanie. She is the one you owe it to."

Lorraine's face hardened.

"What do you think she owes me?" he asked.

"We are not computing the balance on the Amherst affair—we are dealing with the present instance, and in it you were wholly at fault. Because she slipped once, doesn't imply that she slips constantly, nor does it excuse you for assuming that fact. Good God! man, give your wife credit for regretting her mistake and wanting to live it down—it's the normal and rational way to look at it. Be a little charitable in your view—Stephanie needs it—we all need it."

"Do you mean that I should not divorce her—that I should take her back?"

"That question you must decide for yourself."

"I ask for your opinion."

Pendleton shook his head.

"You must decide for yourself," he repeated, preparing to mount.

"I shall decide for myself—but I want your opinion," Lorraine persisted.

Pendleton let his hand rest on the pommel of his saddle and considered. What was the best for Stephanie—to return to Lorraine or to be free of him? He was not sure she knew herself; yet he wanted to help her even in a little, if his advice would be a feather-weight toward that end.

"Tell me!" exclaimed Lorraine again.

He made a quick resolution—it could do no harm—it would still be for her to determine:

"I should by all means take her back—if she will have you," he answered.

"If she will have me!" Lorraine interrogated in surprise. "You think there is any doubt about it?"

"Candidly I do—very material doubt, indeed."

"You say that with knowledge—you have talked with her!" Lorraine cried, instantly suspicious.

"I saw Mrs. Lorraine but a few minutes at the Club-house, yesterday. Is it likely she would discuss you there?" Pendleton replied. "It was not until she was leaving, remember, that she encountered you and your—rebuff."

It was an unfortunate speech. Pendleton realized it as the last word was said.

It brought to Lorraine's mind the scene of yesterday, and his decision—made before them all. He had refused to recognize her then—should he reverse himself within twenty-four hours—make himself the laughing stock of every one—prove himself a mere will-o-the-wisp? He had been about to dash after

Stephanie and apologize—to ask her to come back—to forgive and forget the past. But now he was not so sure—he must take time to consider—must ponder the situation gravely—must——

He looked at Pendleton, indecision showing in his face and sounding in his voice as he replied:

"It is a serious matter—I must think over it, Pendleton, I must think over it. I will know what to do to-morrow—and to-morrow is time enough to decide a matter that has been in abeyance for two years."

Pendleton nodded.

"Very well," he replied. "I said it is a matter for you alone to decide; but if you will be advised *you* will decide it without taking counsel with anyone. Make up your own mind, Lorraine, and then stick to it."

"You're very right, and I'll do it," Lorraine answered; and with a wave of the hand he trotted away.

"I wonder," Pendleton mused, as he went slowly down the hill, "what it must mean not to know your own mind any better than Lorraine knows his—to be as changeable and as irresponsible—to keep debating and putting off a decision for two years—and then be no nearer it than you were at first."

VII

AN OFFER AND AN ANSWER

Lorraine took Pendleton's advice. He did not take counsel with anyone—not even with Cameron, with whom he dined at the Club that evening, and afterward played billiards until bedtime. The thought of what he had said to him yesterday, as to his intended course of conduct, may have deterred him, as well as a hesitation to admit the instability of his own mind. Yesterday he was fixed on divorce—to-day he was not so sure. The real reason for his uncertainty was his wife's beauty. Yesterday he had not noticed it—had not time to notice it, being occupied with the instant.

But this Sunday affair was quite different. He had been alone with her—and he had seen again the adorably beautiful woman—whom once he had possessed, but possessed no longer; who was colder to him now than a graven image.

The trim, slender figure in its close cut walking-skirt; the narrow, high-arched feet that she put down so well; the small head, with its crown of auburn hair; the cold, proud, high-bred face that once had been so tender for him, he now saw in all their loveliness—recollected in all their perfectness. And they weighed heavily in the scale—almost balancing her sin. Nay, there were moments when they did balance it, and a trifle more—until he grew hesitating again and

doubtful. . . . And the hesitancy gradually grew less, and the doubt gradually decreased.

Then one afternoon in the latter part of the week, as he was coming from his office, the day's work done, he saw her ahead of him on the opposite side of the Avenue. And he became so absorbed in watching her that he was three blocks beyond his Club before he realized it.

Guiltily he turned and retraced his steps; and alone, in a quiet corner of the lounge with a high-ball and his face to the wall, he fought it out with himself.

And having fought it out, he did a most unusual thing for him—he acted straightway upon his decision, and did not wait for it to cool and himself to doubt and hesitate and change.

He pushed the bell.

"Call a taxi!" said he to the boy.

When it came, he gave Mrs. Mourraille's number. There was a click, as the flag went up, and they whirred away.

"You need not wait," said he, handing the driver a bill as the car drew up before the house.

The man touched his cap and shot off.

Lorraine crossed the sidewalk, went up the steps and rang the bell.

The aged butler answered. He had been in the Mourraille family for a generation, but even his automaton calm was not proof against such a surprise, and he failed to repress wholly the amazement from his face and manner when he beheld who stood in the doorway.

"I want to see Mrs. Lorraine a moment, Tompkins," said Lorraine, and went in with the utmost nonchalance.

There were no instructions against admitting Lorraine, so Tompkins could do nothing but bow him into the living-room. Then he went slowly up to the library and gave the card to Mrs. Lorraine.

She took it from the tray, wondering as she did so who was calling on *her*, and read the name—and read it again. Then she frowned slightly and remained silent.

The butler stood at attention and waited—waited so long, indeed, that Mrs. Mourraille glanced up from her evening paper, having observed the whole thing, and inquired casually:

"Who is it, Stephanie?"

Her daughter passed the bit of pasteboard across—then nodded to Tompkins that she would be down.

Mrs. Mourraille's heart gave a great bound—if, in so placid a woman, anything ever could bound—when she read the name. The thing for which she had hoped—for which she had prayed—for two years was that Stephanie would make it up with her husband, and go back to him. It was the better way—the way that made everything as nearly right as was humanly possible—the easier way for everyone. If he overlooked her fault, who else had any cause to cavil? She had been much too wise, however, to urge it unasked. It must come voluntarily from Stephanie—then she could add her counsel and encouragement. But better even than Stephanie was Lorraine himself

—and what else could his unexpected coming mean than an overture for a reconciliation!

"You will receive him?" she asked quietly.

Stephanie nodded.

"I suppose," she said, "it is some arrangement about the divorce—but I can't understand why he should come in person to make it."

"Perhaps it is a first step in an attempt to effect a—readjustment of matters," her mother suggested.

Stephanie had risen—now she paused, and a smile flitted across her face.

"As you hope it is—and hope also that it will be successful, *n'est ce pas?*" she said, bending down and kissing her.

"What I hope, dear, is that you will do the best for yourself," Mrs. Mourraille answered—"and you can alone decide that best, and hope to remain satisfied with the decision. Go and see what Harry wants; it was a great deal for him to come here, and you should not keep him waiting."

"Particularly as he may change his mind if I keep him waiting long!" she laughed; and with a little caressing touch to her mother's cheek, she went down to the living-room.

Lorraine was standing with his back to the fireplace, nervously drawing his gloves back and forth through his fingers. He came forward and offered her his hand—and after just a second's hesitation, she touched it momentarily.

It was as though she said:

"As the hostess, I cannot do less, but I don't in the least fancy the doing."

"Will you sit down, Mr. Lorraine?" she said perfunctorily, letting herself sink into a chair with the lithe grace he remembered so well.

She was perfectly at ease—with the air of one who entertains a casual visitor.

She looked at him, politely interrogatively, and waited for him to begin. It was his move, and she did not intend to help him in the least.

Lorraine was not so tranquil—his agitation showed in his slightly flushed face and in his manner. He took out his handkerchief and passed it across his lips. When he did speak he knew it was with an effort and unnaturally.

"Stephanie," he said, "I want to apologize for what I did at the Club-house, and what I said yesterday—will you let me?"

"Certainly," she replied impersonally. "An apology is one thing that you can tender and one thing that I can accept."

"It does not right the injury——" he began.

"No, it does not right it," she concurred.

"Any more than your apology will right the injury you have done me," he added.

"And mine was the greater injury," she observed. "I know it. There is no apology I can offer that will be effective—so, why try?"

"Don't try!" he exclaimed. "Just let us forget it, and take a fresh start." He leaned forward and

took her hand—and she, in sheer amazement, suffered him to retain it. "I am willing to forgive, Stephanie, if you are willing to come back to me. Will you do it, dear?"

For a moment she had the impulse to ask how long this notion had actuated him, and how long he thought that it would last. Then the keen injustice of the taunt came home to her, and with it a sharp sense of just what such an offer meant from *him*. Aside from everything—of blindness when he should have seen, of supineness when he should have acted, of vacillation when he should have known his own mind, of all the other deficiencies of which he was guilty—there yet remained the ever present, ever damning fact that *she* was a guilty wife; and that he was willing to overlook the past, and to restore her to the place she once had, made all his shortcomings as nothing in comparison. It mattered not how soon he might again change his mind—that was not the present question. He had offered. He was waiting for her answer. She had but to accept—and the thing was done beyond the fear of change.

"Will you do it, Stephanie, dear?" she heard him say again—she did not know how often he had said it.

She released her hand and sat staring down at the rug at her feet. It was a Senna prayer rug, beautiful in coloring and soft as an autumn twilight in the tones, but she was looking back into the past—its lost opportunities and forsaken shrines. . . .

Presently her glance shifted to Lorraine—and lingered, speculatively, appraisingly, as though cast-

ing up the balances. It swept him slowly from head to foot, pausing long upon his face—so long, indeed, that he shifted uneasily and smiled in self defence.

"Will you do it, Stephanie, dear?" he repeated.

She slowly shook her head.

"I cannot," she answered.

"Why can't you, dear?" he asked.

"Because I do not love you!"

"What has that to do with the question?" he replied. "Neither do I know that I love you—we must try——"

"I know," she interrupted; "you don't love me—and love is the one thing that could heal the wounds the past two years have made—for us both."

"Do you love that scoundrel Amherst?" he asked.

"I do not," was the calm answer—"and you have termed him rightly—he *is* a scoundrel."

"Do you love any other man?"

"I do not!" looking him straight in the face.

"Then let us try it, Stephanie," he said.

But she shook her head again.

"It is not just to you——"

"Let me be the judge of that," he cut in.

"Neither is it just to me," she ended. "You will take me back for the sake of appearances. You think to save me and yourself some temporary unpleasantness by obviating a divorce—by preventing scare headlines in the papers. You don't see that you would be making untold unpleasantness for us both through the remainder of our lives. When we are apart and need only the Court's severing decree, why should we

assume a life of wretchedness for both? I bear the heavier burden now. I am content to bear it for a little while—until the world has forgotten—rather than to purchase that forgetfulness by a reconciliation which would be only in name—and scarcely in name, indeed."

"Why should it be only in name?" he asked, leaning toward her. "It won't be with me, dear."

"You are very good to say so," she replied—"but you'll think differently in a month—in a week possibly. Amherst will be ever between us—you will always see him; and as time passes you will see him only the more. Nothing we can do will remove him—he will be persistently present—you can't see me without thinking of him—and of what I did with him. And that can have only one result—renewed unhappiness for us both, and eventually the final break. Therefore why not let the break be now—when it is anticipated by every one and is so much easier for us both?"

She might have added—what was in her mind—that with a man of strong and resolute purpose the experiment would not be so hazardous of success; but with one of his character the issue was not even doubtful—it would be decided before it was begun.

A spasm of anger had crossed his face at her reference to Amherst and herself, and for a moment she had hoped that he would recall his offer—but as she talked it passed, and when he spoke it was with quiet resolution.

"Wouldn't we better eliminate Amherst from the

question?" he asked. "I understand that episode has ended!"

"It has, indeed!" she answered,—"as between Amherst and me—but it can never end as between you and me."

"As between you and me it is as we make it," he returned. "I engage that I shall never, by word or act, refer to Amherst, nor to what you have done. It will be as though it had never been. Is not that satisfactory?"

"You can't engage to control your thoughts," she replied; "and thoughts tincture acts, however much we may strive to avoid it. It's generous, more generous than I can say, for you to offer to take me back—but it cannot be, Harry. We may as well face the matter as it is—there need be no concealment between us surely. I do not love you—I never shall love you. You do not love me—you never can love me. It is much wiser to end things now than to drag them along a little while and end them."

"Why do you say I do not love you?" he asked.

"Because you admitted it yourself a moment since, and because, aside from that, I know it."

He made a denying gesture.

"I loved you when we were married," he broke out.

"We both loved then—or thought we did—but we both have learned much, since that day at St. Luke's." She sat up and bent nearer to him. "And one of the things we have learned is that we are better apart—and I have proven it—by running away with another

man. And you have proven it—by not following instantly and taking me from him—or killing him."

"What have I proven by my present attitude?" he demanded.

"Your magnanimity—but not your love. And as I said, love alone would justify a reconciliation now, or give the slightest warrant for the future."

For a time he made no answer, looking at her steadily with thoughtful eyes. At last he spoke.

"Am I to understand then that you refuse my offer?" he asked.

"I refuse!" she answered. "For both our sakes —yours as well as mine—I refuse your offer."

There was a finality in her manner that left him no present ground for hope. It was useless to argue further at this time, and he knew it. He arose to go. She arose also.

Then a sudden, irresistible impulse came over him. Scarce knowing what he did, nor the reason why he did it, he seized her in his arms and crushed her to him.

She fought him in silence; with all her strength she strove to break from his encircling arms—that held her only the tighter, while his face drew slowly nearer hers. Her breath came in fierce gasps, as closer and closer he pressed her—his lips ever nearer and nearer to her own.

"Let me go!" she panted. "Let me go!"

But he only smiled. The perfume from her hair, the warmth of her body, the intoxication from her

person were working their due. He was only a man —and she was only a woman.

He kissed her on the lips fiercely—once—twice—a score of times—straining her to him with an intensity that left her helpless.

"You coward!—you coward!—you coward!" she kept repeating.

And every time he kissed her more fiercely than the last.

Then, suddenly as he had seized her, he loosed her and stepped back—so suddenly, indeed, she swayed and almost fell.

"You beast! you miserable beast!" she breathed, wiping away his kisses.

He laughed, a low mocking laugh.

"Did you call Amherst a beast?" he asked.

"You miserable beast!" she repeated.

"Who has a better right?" he queried.

"You miserable beast," she said again.

"Who has a better right to kiss you than your husband? Your lover?" he sneered.

"Go!" she cried, pointing to the door. "Go! and never speak to me again."

"Why all these melodramatics?" he inquired. "What have I done that is wrong—how have I offended?"

"I have asked you to leave the house," she answered. "If you go quietly at once well and good. If you do not"—laying her hand on the button in the wall behind her—"I shall ring for Tompkins and bid him summon the police."

"Still melodramatic!" he laughed.

She pressed the button.

"You shall decide whether the butler shows you out or summons an officer," she replied.

Tompkins appeared in the doorway and waited.

She looked calmly at Lorraine, and Lorraine looked at her—then he held out his hand.

"Good-bye!" he said.

"Good-bye!" she answered, and turned away.

He took a step toward her, and dropped his voice so that Tompkins could not hear.

"And I'm not so sure *now* that I want a divorce," he said—"and *you* can't get one."

Her only reply was the slightest shrug of the shoulders and an expressive motion of her hands—she did not even take the trouble to turn her head.

And after a second's hesitation, Lorraine faced about and strode away.

VIII

THE SUMMONS

A MONTH went by and Lorraine made no move to obtain a divorce—neither did he appear to seek a reconciliation. At first Society was aghast with wonder, then it gradually accepted the course as one of Lorraine's eccentricities of character. At the beginning he had made no secret of his purpose to institute suit whenever personal service could be obtained on her—although he was of course aware that personal service was not necessary in such a case. He had a rather Quixotic idea of the matter, it seemed. Now when he was given the opportunity, and had openly expressed his intention to proceed forthwith, he suddenly veered off and became non-committal and non-communicative—even to his intimate friends.

They did not know—no one knew from him—that he had offered reconciliation and that Stephanie had refused it. On this he was absolutely silent. He had been injured enough before all the world without giving it fresh food for gossip in this new injury that was almost as searing to his pride as the other. To have his wife run off with another man was humiliating enough, but to have his offer to forget and forgive, and to reinstate calmly declined, was mortifying to the last degree. Even to Cameron he could not bring himself to confess such a shameful thing.

And the more he brooded over it, the greater

seemed the wrong and the more he grew to hate—not Stephanie, but Amherst. Amherst's was the injury: if he had not led her astray there never would have been the scandal—and her love would not have been lost. No—Stephanie was not to blame! It was Amherst! Amherst had entered his home and had robbed him of his dearest possessions—his wife and his wife's love; made of him a mock and a jest—a thing despised or pitied, as the case might be. He imagined that he was the butt of all Society—the forsaken husband at whom they were laughing slyly for his incompetence in not protecting his own.

But instead of confiding his notion to Cameron or to some other friend, as he was wont to do, he buried it deep in his heart—and fed upon it until it became the main-spring of his life: to square accounts with Amherst. And as Amherst grew the blacker to him, Stephanie grew the whiter—until finally he even acquitted her of all voluntary wrong. She was Amherst's victim, as much as himself.

Which, only to a certain extent, was true. Amherst had led her astray—but she had gone willingly, and with never a thought of the husband who was too weak or too heedless to hold her to propriety and duty.

And though he nursed his wrath to keep it warm, he did not venture—yet—to intrude on Stephanie again. He went his usual way; and with the craft of his passion he was changed only in one respect:—upon the subject of his marred life, its past and its future, concerning which he had once been so voluble, he now never spoke.

And unless he spoke first, no one could speak to him. Though every one marvelled exceedingly—and many expressed their marvel to one another in becoming or unbecoming fashion, depending on the respective point of view and the respective disposition of the expressor—usually a woman.

Stephanie, meanwhile, went her way with the same air of contemptuous indifference that she had shown on the Club-house piazza the afternoon of her reappearance.

At first, Society had resented it—a few resented it actively—but soon they began to soften a bit, and not to be quite blind when she was in the vicinity. Stephanie Lorraine was of unimpeachable birth. Her ancestors had been in Society as long as there was any Society to be in—except aborigines; and if one, under such circumstances, assumes an attitude of superiority, the general herd will follow in time—even though the way be through the avenue of the Divorce Court.

The difficulty in the case was that Mrs. Postlewaite and Mrs. Porterfield—the "Queen P's," as they were called—were a trifle recalcitrant. They ruled Society and they had not approved of Stephanie's doings even before she married. She had been quite too disregardful of conventions. Her affair with Amherst was shameful enough, they averred, but when it had culminated in the elopement, they were outraged beyond words—figuratively speaking, that is; there was no paucity and little repression of language in the actual. And when she suddenly returned,

without a warning or even an intimation, and came up to the Club-house in the most casual manner—as though she had done *nothing! nothing! nothing!* they were enraged at her "effrontery." It was the end of their reign, they saw, unless she were made to pay penance for her offence in sackcloth and ashes. The younger set would defy their authority—they were near to defying it now, with their new-fangled ideas and disregard for every convention that stood for the old order.

They might overlook some things, even though they were bizarre and questionable, but Stephanie's offence was beyond the pale. If she were permitted to come back to all her old privileges, and to go unpunished by Society for her crime against it, then the reign of the dissolute and depraved had begun. And they shook their heads gravely, and with much decision resolved that it must not be.

So they let their decision be known and set quickly to work. It was acquiesced in by almost all elders and by those who naturally follow the leaders. Of the others, the majority thought that there was no haste in the matter, and composed themselves and awaited developments. The few who were independent, and accustomed to do as they pleased, were uninfluenced by the rest—but they waited also. And those that the Queen P's had thought would receive Stephanie with open arms—the fast members of the younger set—held off, and even edged away. They realized that the Lorraine affair had made their own conduct all the more marked, and they were afraid to take her

up. As one of them put it: "A fellow feeling's all right—but we're not running an eleemosynary institution at this stage of the game." The degrees of intimacy, moreover, could be gauged by the manner of salutation. Some did not speak at all—some spoke only when it could not be avoided—some spoke when the occasion required—some spoke always but with a certain reserve—some spoke naturally, but went no further—some were as they had always been—friends.

And Stephanie met them in kind.

Gladys Chamberlain, Elaine Croyden, Dorothy Tazewell, Margaret Middleton, Helen Burleston, Sophia Westlake, and a few others among the women, were her friends. Pendleton, Burgoyne, Croyden, Mortimer, Fitzgerald, Devereux, Westlake, Devonshire and a score of others among the men. There is never a dearth of men where the woman is a beauty and well-born—that she is also a woman with a past only adds to her attractiveness.

To but one person, other than her mother, did Stephanie reveal the incident of Lorraine's visit—and then not until some time thereafter.

It was one evening when she and Pendleton had dined together alone at her home—Mrs. Mourraille being out of town for several days—and were sitting afterward in the piazza-room in the moonlight.

"Stephanie," said he—after a pause, and apropos of nothing—dropping his cigarette into the ash tray on the taboret between them and lighting another, "what do you make out of Lorraine—isn't his conduct exceedingly queer?"

"In what way?" she asked.

"In not applying for a divorce."

"Is that an exhibition of queerness on his part?" she smiled.

"It is—he never does the natural thing. What would be idiotic in a sensible chap is just what one expects from him. That Saturday at the Club-house—afterward, you know—he was going to begin action on Monday. And Sunday you had the peculiar scene in the Park where he threatened you with its immediate filing and so on—yet since that day no one has ever heard him mention divorce."

"Rather an unusual time for Harry to hold to one opinion!" she laughed. "I should say a change is long overdue." And when Pendleton looked at her with a puzzled air she added: "He told me he would not get a divorce—and that I could not. I'm waiting for him to change his mind again and to file his papers. I am advised that once filed they cannot be withdrawn without my consent, and that I am permitted to press for a decision."

"He told you that Sunday in the Park?" he exclaimed.

"No—it was somewhat later in the week. He came here, and—offered to—take me back—to forget and forgive. And I declined."

"You declined?" he marvelled. "Did you appreciate what you were throwing away, Stephanie?"

"Yes—a worthless man, for one thing," she replied.

"And what else?" he asked, leaning a bit forward.

"A life-time of incompatibility and discord."

"And what else?"

"The opportunity for Society to overlook my—sin," she answered.

He nodded. "Just so—and you choose against Society. Was it wise, Stephanie; was it wise, do you think?"

"What do *you* think it was, Montague?" she asked with an intimate little smile.

"I think it was very foolish," he replied promptly; then added—"from the point of expediency."

"And very wise from the point of happiness and myself—*n'est ce pas?*" she smiled.

"Yes," he said; "unquestionably, yes—but few would have had the courage to refuse."

"Let me tell you about it," she broke in. She disliked praise even from her best friends, and she feared Pendleton would not remember. "Mother was dreadfully disappointed, I fear—though she has not mentioned the matter since. It was the expedient way, of course; it would minimize the scandal, and things would go along pretty much as before. That is just the difficulty. I couldn't return to the old way. I could not endure it for a moment—not even long enough to make a show at the reconciliation so that I might purchase Society's forgetfulness. No, not even if I could be assured, before going back to him, of ultimately being divorced."

"I understand," he said.

"You always understand, Montague," she replied. "You're the most satisfactory of friends."

He made a deprecatory gesture. He was as averse as she to praise.

"You were about to tell of the Lorraine offer?" he reminded her.

And she told him all—not withholding even the final scene.

"I am not surprised," he remarked, when she had finished. "It is just what one might expect from Lorraine. He was not too strong-minded to start with, and this affair seems to have put him entirely to the bad. He is keeping his own counsel now, however, which is suspicious. As you say, he is long overdue for a change of mind, and it doesn't seem to be forthcoming. How does he act when he sees you—if you've noticed?"

"It is rather queer but I haven't seen him since that afternoon. Possibly because I've been at the Club very rarely—not over a half-dozen times, I should say—you were with me on the most of them."

"At least he has been quiescent," Pendleton added —"and sticking to business, I hear, most assiduously. In that respect your coming back seems to have steadied him."

"I'm glad to have done him some good indirectly," she smiled.

"He still is just a boy," said Pendleton, "despite his thirty years. He has always had his own way, with nothing to settle him until this came—and it completely unsettled him. So much so that very few

of the men had much sympathy for him. It went to you, Stephanie, instead. In fact, the men had the matter right from the very first; they knew Lorraine, they knew Amherst, and they knew—other things, as well."

"And the women?" she asked.

"Oh, damn the women!" he replied.—"I beg your pardon, Stephanie—but it is Mrs. Postlewaite and Mrs. Porterfield and all their kind, I mean. A small number are discriminating and broad minded, like Gladys Chamberlain and Elaine Croyden and Sophia Westlake and a few more. They are friends—the rest are worthless bundles of dress goods—manikins, if you please, pulled this way and that by the fetish of the commonplace and the proper."

"Don't tell Mrs. Postlewaite!" laughed Stephanie. "She would have a fit."

"It might do her some good if she had. I despise those people who are so smug and self satisfied in their assumed superiority that they think their *ipse dixit* inflates the social balloon. It's a positive pleasure to have some one kick a hole in it just to show them they're wrong."

"As I did, you mean," said she. "However, it would have been quite as effective had I made another sort of kick. I punctured the balloon, all right, but its entangling folds may stifle me. At least they are pretty stifling at present. It would be a small matter if I were a man—a man can do things and be none the worse for them; but I'm a woman—and it is a powerful big undertaking, Montague, for a woman

to kick the social balloon. Generally the balloon flies back and overwhelms her."

"It's not going to overwhelm you," he insisted.

"Not if you and the rest of my friends can prevent—and I think you can," she replied. "I am fortunate in my friends—that is where I'm very, very lucky."

He smiled sympathetically. He knew what she did not:—the Governors of the Country Club were meeting that night and her resignation as a member would likely be requested.

The Queen P's and *their* allies had accomplished so much of their plans for her punishment. The majority of the Board was made up of men who sought to be popular, and who kow-towed to Mrs. Postlewaite and her clique as the ultimate authority. The popular thing was to run with the sentiment, and so they were running. The few younger members were sure to vote against it, but they would be too weak in numbers to control. He would not tell her, however, for something might yet intervene to prevent—the want of a quorum; the want of a sufficient majority; the want of anything would cause the matter to be postponed.

As an echo to his thoughts came her next remark.

"I have considered, Montague, that it might be well if I were to resign from the Country Club," she said. "I know that almost all the women members are violently opposed to me, and it seems scarcely just to the few friends I have there for me to put them on the defensive and oblige them to make a fight. The

Queen P's are hot against me, and they can render it exceedingly unpleasant for the meager opposition, if they are so minded—and I think we may assume that they are. What would you advise?"

For a while he was silent—his fingers playing slowly over the arm of his chair. He was disposed to answer no—she should not be forced into resigning, at this late day, by all the sentiment the infernal women could muster. Had she acted promptly on her return it would have been entirely voluntary; now it savored too much of compulsion, and yet without any one bearing the responsibility. On the other hand, if she permitted the Club to *demand* her resignation, she did not make the actual opposition any more violent, while all those who opposed such radical action—and he knew their number was not small—would naturally be favorable, in a greater or less degree, to her cause. In other words, she would stand to lose none and to gain many.

"What would you advise me to do, Montague?" she repeated.

"I would advise you not to resign. Hold on—and let them do the resigning for you, if the Governors are so minded."

"You mean you would let them request my resignation?"

He nodded. "It will make you friends—assuredly it will lose you none. That is where a woman has the advantage over a man. A Club can kick a man out and no one ever questions its justice—but it is different with a woman. She is entitled to something

more than mere justice—a certain courtesy and consideration must always be hers, together with a proper regard for her sex. Mere justice to a woman becomes injustice—and injustice always reacts on itself."

"You are considering the matter only as it affects me," Stephanie insisted, "while I'm concerned as to the way it affects my friends. What ought I do out of regard for *them*, is the question."

"Whatever is best for yourself," he answered. "They are friends, you know."

"But I don't know what is best—moreover, for myself I don't care a rap one way or the other. It is nothing to me to belong to their Club, or to chatter small talk and scandal, to lunch and dine and go to the horse-show, and fancy I'm having a glorious time. I'm not a debutante any longer. I've seen enough of life to know the shallows—and Society is the shallowest of them all."

"Yes you do care, Stephanie," he said. "You think that you don't, and all that, but everyone cares for them to a greater or less extent. It's only a matter of degree—life is made up of degrees, and social amenities, their obligations and duties are a part of life."

"I suppose you're right," she admitted, "but, just at present, mine are in an infinitesimal degree," and she crossed her knees and leaned back in content. "At this moment I haven't a care in the world."

"Miss Philosopher!" he smiled.

"*Mrs.* Philosopher, you mean!" she corrected.

"Your pardon!" said he. "For the moment, I quite forgot."

"It might be well to forget it forever," she reflected.

"I am very willing," he replied, regarding her with indulgent eyes.

She gave him a quick glance, then looked away and a dreamy expression shone in her eyes.

"Montague," she said presently. "Is there no way that I can procure a divorce?"

"I'm afraid not," he answered very kindly—"unless Lorraine permits it. He has offered you a home and to take you back, and you have refused; so that disposes of desertion or non-support. And if you try to convict him of having been—indiscreet—he can set up your own indiscretion as a defense."

"Isn't incompatibility of temper a ground for divorce?" she asked.

"Yes, but it would not apply in your case, if he opposed the suit."

"It all rests with him then," she remarked, with a shrug of denuded shoulders. "Unless he wishes to be free of me, I must stay bound. It doesn't seem quite just—and it's *very* irksome."

"It is entirely just," he said, "but it *is* irksome to you—and foolish in him to hold you. However, it is his right and he alone is the judge. The sensible thing would be for him to divorce you on the ground of desertion. It would accomplish the result with a minimum of unpleasantness for you both."

"Then it would be the first time that he ever did

the sensible thing, when he could do the reverse," she remarked.

"Aren't you a little bitter?" he smiled.

"Bitter!" she said thoughtfully. "Probably I am. I can't pardon him for his supineness, his silly disregard of my danger. I may be wrong—may be doing him a deep injustice—but I shall never forgive him for letting me sink into Amherst's clutches. A pretty mess I have made of my life so far!" she commented, with a sarcastic little laugh.

He leaned forward and took her hand—and she let him take it.

"Don't, dear!" he entreated, with all the tenderness of the strong man. "It is not such a mess as you think. It will work out for your advantage—it has already done so—you're free of both Lorraine and Amherst. Isn't that something?"

"If I *were* free of Lorraine I think I should be satisfied; it would be worth everything else—but I'm not."

"Not legally free, but free in fact," he answered. "And you'll be legally free also in a short time—a very short time. Lorraine's present mind can't last much longer, Stephanie."

"I hope you're a true prophet," said she, withdrawing her hand—as Tompkins appeared to light the candles in their big glass shades.

"I wish I were as certain of something else as I am of that," he reflected slowly, studying the coal of his cigarette, but watching her face with deliberately avowed surreptitiousness.

And she observed it and inferred what he meant, and her pulses beat a trifle faster, but beyond a smile, which she contrived to be half-puzzled, half-questioning, and wholly fascinating, she made no answer.

She was lovelier now, he thought, than he had ever seen her. Her figure, in its clinging narrow evening gown, had rounded into the most adorable curves, though retaining all its youthful slenderness. Two years ago she had suggested what to-night she was—a glorious woman. And the flawless face, ordinarily so cold in its beauty, was soft and tender as he had never thought to see it. He bent over and deliberately looked her in the eyes—and she, from the recess of her chair, knowing that he would come no further, calmly looked him back. Neither spoke—yet the one told a purpose formed, and the other did not warn him to desist.

"Do you realize just how lovely you are?" he asked.

"Yes," she smiled. "I have my eyes and my mirrors—and an admiring maid."

"But you haven't——" he began—and broke off. He was about to say "you haven't a husband to tell you."

And she guessed his words instantly—but not his exact meaning.

"'I haven't a husband to tell me,' you were going to say. Why didn't you say it? It would have been no more than the truth."

"I was not thinking of Lorraine as the husband," he replied.

She gave a little gasp of surprise at its unexpectedness—a gasp that ended, however, in a smile and a shake of the ruddy head.

"Please give me a cigarette," she said, extending her hand.

He drew out his case and offered it to her.

"Is this all that I may give you now?" he asked.

"All!" she replied, passing a match across the tip. "All—now. . . . What is it, Tompkins?" as the butler appeared in the doorway and bowed.

"The telephone, madam!" monotoned Tompkins.

"Did you get the name?" she asked.

"The Homœopathic Hospital, madam; they want to speak to you at once."

"What can it be?" she exclaimed, turning to Pendleton. "Come into the living-room with me, Montague—I'm afraid of hospitals—dreadfully afraid—even by telephone."

Pendleton arose and accompanied her.

"It is nothing," he assured her.

"I am Mrs. Lorraine," she said, when she reached the receiver. "What is it, please?"

"This is the Hahnemann Hospital, Mrs. Lorraine," came the answer and Pendleton could hear it on the other side of the table. "Your husband was seriously injured this evening when his automobile collided with a street car. He was unconscious when brought in, but revived for a moment and has asked for you."

She raised her eyes to Pendleton. He nodded that he had understood.

"Is conscious now?" she asked to gain time. Her mind was in a whirl.

"No—he relapsed almost instantly. It is impossible to tell now how seriously he is injured. He has bled profusely, from several superficial wounds, but we fear he has been hurt internally. He may also be suffering from concussion. We thought it best, Mrs. Lorraine, to advise you of his condition and that he asked for you," the voice went on, a trifle apologetically.

"You did very right," she replied. "I'll come to the Hospital at once."

She hung up the receiver and looked at Pendleton.

"You heard?"

"Everything."

"What *could* I do?" she demanded.

"Nothing but what you did."

"But I don't want to do it—I don't want to see him—I don't wish him to die, but——"

"Never mind," he said tenderly. "You don't have to go—you are quite justified in not seeing him. And his condition is not dependent upon your presence or your absence. Do exactly as you choose, Stephanie."

"But *if* he should die! If he should die, having asked for me, and I having been told and then not hastening to him at once! As a fellow human—not as a wife—is it right that I should deny him what may be his last request?"

"A request he has already forgotten in unconsciousness," Pendleton replied. "Under all the cir-

cumstances, your duty depends wholly upon your own desires—to go or not to go as you think best. You are not obligated to consider anything else. Hence I approved of your first determination to go to the Hospital; when you changed your mind and said you would not go, I approve of it also."

"What do you *advise* me to do?" she asked tremulously.

"I should advise you to go," he said quietly.

"And stay?"

"That can be determined later."

"And will you go with me?"

"I'll go anywhere or do anything you want, dear," he replied.

IX

HOPELESSNESS AND THREATS

THROWING a wrap over her evening gown, Stephanie hurried out and into Pendleton's car, which was standing at the curb. He sprang after, opened the throttle and they whirled away.

"How long will it take to get to the Hospital?" she asked.

"About fifteen minutes—if we are not held up by traffic when we come off the Boulevard."

"I suppose I ought not to feel indifferent at such a time," she said presently. "But I do—and I won't hide that I do. I'll try to meet what the occasion demands but nothing more. If he still wants me, I'll go to him. If he is conscious and hasn't asked for me again, I'll come away. It will be a relief to come away. I have no longer any duty to him. At least I feel that I haven't—and so why pretend the one or do the other?"

"Would you rather not go?" he asked, slowing down.

"I would *much* rather not go," she replied—"but I'm going just because I'm not sure of my duty in the matter. I swore at our marriage to love, honor and cherish him. I don't love him—I think I never honored him—I'm not sure that it will do any good for me to cherish him—but I'll try to be kind while his life is in danger—when the danger has passed, the cherish-

ing shall cease." She stole a look at the man beside. "A queer philosophy, you think doubtless—and possibly it is; but toward some few people, my husband among them, I have as much feeling as a piece of marble—rather less indeed. Don't try to understand me, Montague—you can't; I don't understand myself."

She was overwrought, he saw. This sudden call to confront a condition such as she had never anticipated—the distressing fact that Lorraine, injured maybe unto death, had asked for her—had stretched her nerves to attenuation.

It was not for him to tell her what she should do. In truth, he did not know. The one thing that made it difficult was Lorraine's request. If it were not for that he would not have hesitated. But it is hard to refuse a dying man—or one who may be dying.

"Steady yourself, Stephanie!" he said, as the car ran in under the *porte cochere* of the Hospital.

"I am steadied," she answered. "I'll be all right when we enter—I'm not going to collapse or shriek or make a scene, you may be sure."

He rang the bell, gave the name, and they passed into the reception-room.

In a moment a white uniformed nurse entered—a woman of middle age, quiet and business-like.

"Mrs. Lorraine?" she asked.

"Yes," Stephanie answered.

"I am Mrs. Bangs, the head nurse, Mrs. Lorraine. Your husband has not regained consciousness, I am sorry to say. Doctor Wilton has been advised

of your arrival and he'll see you just as soon as possible. Will you come into the resident physician's office and wait? It will be only a moment, I'm sure."

They crossed the corridor, were shown into the office, and the nurse went about her duties.

There is not much sentiment in a hospital attendant—at least toward those not patients—and the patients themselves are but cases in the abstract.

Stephanie looked at Pendleton and smiled.

"You see—I'm steady," she said, holding up her hand. "A trifle too steady for an injured man's wife, I fear—though, I suppose, they all know the state of our—affairs."

"Every one knows it—if they've read the newspapers," Pendleton returned.

"And it's safe to assume that they have; and that they believed all they read as well—and then some. It's a common failing. I'd do the same about someone else, I reckon—if it happened to interest me."

"*There* is just the difference—it wouldn't interest you, nor me, nor any right-thinking person."

"Then the right-thinking persons are very scarce in this world!" she smiled.

"I shouldn't call them scarce," he replied—"very much in the minority would be better."

Dr. Wilton entered the room at that moment—the rubber-soled shoes having deadened his steps in the corridor. His was one of the old families, and so he was no stranger to Stephanie or to Pendleton. He was familiar with the peculiar situation—and, man like, sympathized with Stephanie. He responded

to the look of inquiry in her eyes before she had time to ask.

"Your husband, Mrs. Lorraine, is resting quietly. The concussion is slight—and unless something develops internally, which we can't yet tell, he will likely recover. He has had four ribs broken, has sustained numerous cuts and bruises, and has lost much blood—but these are merely temporary in their effects."

"Has he recovered consciousness?" Stephanie asked.

"At brief intervals—but not for any length of time."

"Is there any indication that he is hurt internally?"

"It is too early to know certainly; though the character of the accident and the wounds make it very possible. There was a slight hemorrhage, but that has ceased."

It was as if he were discussing the case with an ordinary visitor or a reporter. He already knew she was not likely to be particularly interested, but the impersonal manner in which she asked and received his account of her husband's accident—certainly grievous and possibly fatal—was most indicative. He found himself wondering why she had taken the trouble to come at all.

And she read something of what he thought, for she remarked, without preliminary:

"The Hospital said over the telephone that he had asked for me when he was first brought in—and I came because of that. Has he asked again?"

"I think not, Mrs. Lorraine—nor for any one."

"May I see him?"

The doctor hesitated. "You may—if you very much wish—but we should prefer not."

"Can I do him any good by seeing him?"

"Not a particle. He is, pardon me, much better as it is—with the surgeons and nurses. In such cases, the presence even of one nearly connected is frequently a deterrent, and excites the patient unduly."

"I can do nothing then?" she persisted.

"Absolutely nothing," he assured her.

"And in event of his needing me?"

"We will telephone you."

"You think I should not wait?"

"I do," he said. "It is quite unnecessary. At present, Mrs. Lorraine, your husband is in no immediate danger."

Either Harry had revoked his request, or Doctor Wilton was making it easy for her.—At all events, she could depart with the equanimity of a duty done.

"Then I will go home—depending on being advised on the instant, if I am needed," she said with the most bewitching smile and holding out her hand.

The doctor took it in a friendly grasp.

"I think that is best, Mrs. Lorraine," he replied.

"I suppose you know nothing of the details of the accident?" she asked.

"No—we leave them to the newspapers and the ambulance chasers," he smiled. "Our record begins with Mr. Lorraine's entry here."

"I will depend then upon the Hospital notifying

me if I am needed," she repeated, and with another smile and a nod she went out.

"Thank heavens!" she exclaimed, with a sigh of relief, when they were once more in the car and turned toward her home. "I've done as much as the circumstances warrant—at least, to my mind. The next move is up to him and the Hospital."

"You've done all that anyone could demand," he said. "More than was necessary, I think."

"Which being the case, I'm going to forget it, except that twice a day, until he is out of danger, I shall inquire for him by telephone. Now let us talk of something else."

It was on the fourth day thereafter that Doctor Wilton himself called Stephanie on the telephone.

"Mr. Lorraine has asked for you," he informed her. "He knows that you were here the night of the accident and it pleased him greatly. Will you come some time this morning, if it is convenient?"

"It is not very convenient," Stephanie responded; "I am going out of town—to Criss-Cross—this afternoon for a couple of days, but I'll stop in for a moment. I can't well break the appointment at this late moment."

"Very well," said he. "I'll just tell him I have concluded it is unwise for him to see you for a day or so."

She drummed a moment on the table.

"No, I will come," she decided—"at eleven thirty—will you please see that I am admitted promptly?"

And at eleven thirty she was there and Doctor Wilton received her.

"The nurse will remain, I suppose," she remarked, as they reached the door of Lorraine's room.

He understood.

"If you do not object," he replied. "It would not be well for her to leave her patient—in his present condition."

Lorraine glanced up as the door opened—and when he recognized his wife he smiled and put out his hand.

"I'm glad to see you, dear," he said.

"I'm glad to see you so much better," she replied, taking his hand, but not offering to kiss him. "You had a narrow escape!"

"Rather close call," he admitted.

The doctor, after a word to the nurse, had gone out—and the nurse remained. Lorraine's eyes glanced at her impatiently. She was occupied with the chart.

"You're ever so much stronger—aren't you?" said Stephanie, inanely.

"I suppose so—I think I am. . . . They told me of your being here the evening I was injured. It was very good of you to come, Stephanie."

"I came because they told me *you* had asked for me," said she quietly.

"I did—I thought I was going to die; and I wanted to see you again—just to—apologize."

"Don't think of that," she replied hastily. "You're not going to die."

"They say I'll probably pull through now—my head is all right—but I'm pretty weak."

"Of course, you're weak," she echoed. "Who wouldn't be weak with all that you've endured."

She simply did not know what to say to him. The last spark of affection was in ashes—cold ashes—else would it have been warmed, at least a trifle, by the sight of him lying there, injured and helpless.

He smiled faintly—and the nurse came to the rescue. She looked at Mrs. Lorraine meaningly. Stephanie nodded.

"Your nurse intimates that it is time for me to go," she remarked. "And the nurse is in command." She reached down and took his hand. "Good bye!" she said.

"You will come again!" he questioned.

"Certainly, whenever you wish—and the nurse lets me."

He smiled—and she, with an answering smile, went quietly out.

He closed his eyes and lay quite still. The nurse came to the bed; played with gentle fingers a moment upon his wrist, and went softly away.

It was pretty hopeless, he reflected, pretty hopeless! Stephanie cared no more for him than for an utter stranger—probably less. She had come in response to his request, but she had let him know that it *was* because he had asked for her and not of her own volition. And when she did come, the talk had been the veriest of inanities; and the nurse had remained in the room the entire time—at Stephanie's behest he had little doubt. Her "whenever you wish," had really meant, "but don't wish" . . . He did

not see why she had taken the trouble to come at all, since he was nothing to her—why she had not simply answered that she would not come, that she no longer recognized any obligation toward him. Everyone knew the facts of the last two years so why should she not be candid, even brutally so? This visit was nothing—nothing but ashes to them both—nothing but the proof that the rupture was beyond repair. And he loved her still!—loved her as in the days of courtship, though it had been obscured by the hate and injury of the recent past. If he could not affect her now, even so far as to win a look of regard, his case was forlorn. If his condition would not melt even a little the ice of her reserve, there was small hope. But he *would* hope!—*would* hope! It was not her fault—it was Amherst's. He acquitted her—she was a wronged woman—he was a wronged husband! Amherst was the villain! Amherst was——

There was a light touch on his shoulder. He opened his eyes—the nurse was standing beside him, a glass of orange juice in her hand, a smile on her face.

"It is time to take your nourishment," she said.

For a moment he was tempted to refuse—but she smiled again, very sweetly; and put the glass to his lips.

"Now, try to relax and sleep a while," she suggested.

"Is that an order?" he said faintly.

"An order," she answered, dropping her hand on his forehead and smoothing it with deft touch.

He smiled up at her,—and closed his eyes—and presently he slept.

. . . . . .

Stephanie, when she left the Hospital, went on to the shopping district.

It was the first time she had been down town since the day before Lorraine's accident—and she very quickly noticed the difference in the attitude of many that she knew and met. There was a more manifest cordiality, slight in some cases, more open in others, but unmistakable nevertheless. More people looked at her in a friendly way, and would have spoken had she given them the chance. But *she* never saw them, or looked right through them—depending upon whether hitherto they had been negative or positive in their hostility. From all those who had spoken heretofore, she accepted the additional smile or word of greeting—from all those with whom it was an initial effort she declined the overtures.

Mrs. Postlewaite passed down the aisle just as Stephanie was turning away from the glove counter, and the *grande dame* relaxed sufficiently to glance at her in a personal way and to give her the chance to return the glance—her manner even indicating that, if Stephanie were brave enough to speak, she might condescend to acknowledge it with the faintest nod. It was plainly a look of permission—but Stephanie never looked; though taking due care to let Mrs. Postlewaite know that she saw. And the ancient lady's face congealed into impassivity—and they went their respective ways.

She knew, of course, what had caused the change. It had become known that she had visited her husband at his request—and they assumed a reconciliation was likely to follow.

She finished her shopping and went out to her car—to find it with a deflated tire and the driver just beginning the repair. She glanced at the clock on the dash. It was after one. She was much later than she thought.

"Is that the correct time?" she asked the man.

"Yes, Mrs. Lorraine!" said he, touching his cap but without raising his eyes from the wheel.

It would be too late to go home for luncheon, by the time the repair was made, so she turned back into the department store and took the elevator to the dining room on the top floor.

The place was crowded—the head waiter and the captains at the far end of the room, as usual. There was no empty table in sight, and Stephanie paused at the door.

Instantly the eyes of a hundred women focussed on her. At the same time Marcia Emerson, sitting some distance down the room, saw her and getting up hastily came forward.

"Won't you join me at my table, Mrs. Lorraine?" she asked. "It's for two and I'm alone."

It so happened that Stephanie, since her return, had not encountered Miss Emerson, therefore there could be no memory of glances withheld nor of greetings lacking. It was very polite in her and she could

not well refuse, though she would have been better satisfied had Marcia not done it.

"I shall be glad to join you—you're very kind," she answered.

An audible buzz went up as they passed down the aisle to their table.

Some who were not acquainted with her were simply curious to see the noted Mrs. Lorraine—others, who knew both well were startled at the one's temerity and the other's acquiescence. Why Marcia Emerson should endanger her social position, none too strong with the powers that be, was more than they could understand. Never independent themselves, they could not appreciate intrepidity in another. In such a case, they trimmed their sails to the leader's wind and were content to remain under convoy. So far as they were aware, the wind had not veered with any strength to Mrs. Lorraine's quarter. And even though some had heard of the prospective reconciliation, they waited to take their cue from one of those powerful enough to indicate an assured course of action.

"I assume you know how rash you are in inviting me to your own table, and in coming the length of the room to do it," she remarked. "I am distinctly *persona non grata* at present."

"You're not to me," said Marcia heartily. "I don't follow Mrs. Postlewaite and her clique. I do as I wish, and where I wish it. Your affairs are your own—they concern only those directly involved. I'm not involved, therefore it is an unwarrantable impertinence for me to interfere in the slightest—or to

judge. I've been out of town for the past three weeks is why I've not called—which, I hope, you will pardon. I didn't know you intimately before you went away, but if you'll permit it we will start in just where we left off."

"It may hurt you with the conservatives," Stephanie warned.

Miss Emerson shrugged her shoulders. "And that might injure my standing in Society, since I've not a too secure footing as it is. Let it, I'll take my chance as it pleases me to take it, not as some one else would make me take it. I'm responsible for my friendships, and I'm not going to have anyone tell me who they shall be—or who they mustn't be. Imagine a *man* submitting to any such dictation!"

"I can't imagine it!" smiled Stephanie. "He would laugh in their faces—or else tell them a few truths in very plain English."

"Exactly! We women are silly fools in the way we submit to being controlled. We haven't any independence even in our clothes. We let a few shoddy French modistes, and their *demi-mondaine* assistants at the Longchamps races, prescribe what we shall wear, and we follow with the abject servility of slaves —never pausing to think whether the fashions are becoming, or hideous, or grotesque. And we change them every three months—so the tailors and dressmakers can overcharge us four times a year. *A man!* I should like to see the tailors who had the hardihood to try it. They make his clothes as *he* wants them, and they make them the same way and the same cut

year after year. A man can wear out his clothes, and be in fashion until they're worn out if it takes five years. His hats are the same style year after year, his shoes are the same last, his collars and neckties vary practically not at all. There is something fine about a man's supreme indifference; making the tradesmen do as he wants, instead of as the tradesman wants—as we do. And it's all because we are afraid; afraid of being behind the styles—behind some one who has something newer than ourselves. We forget that we control the styles, and that if we would simply refuse to change there would not be a change—and the modistes would become—as the men's tailors are—purveyors of goods, not dictators of styles."

"It is absurd, of course," agreed Stephanie; "yet who is to break the chains that custom has welded? We women are more or less fools—and the shopkeepers and their class trade on the fact, and laugh in their sleeves while doing it. And we know we're fools and that they're laughing, but we pretend ignorance. It must be very amusing to a man."

"If he takes time enough to notice it—or if it doesn't touch him in the pocket," Marcia returned.

"More especially the latter!" Stephanie laughed.

She saw Mrs. Porterfield coming down the room with Mrs. Postlewaite. As they neared, she glanced at them with the casual look of a total stranger, and went on with her luncheon. Miss Emerson remarked it and smiled inwardly in appreciation of the situation. It was beautifully carried off. The Queen P's were being deliberately ignored—not Mrs. Lorraine.

As they passed, both dames nodded pleasantly to Marcia. Then Mrs. Porterfield, catching Stephanie's eye, bowed slightly but with unmistakable deliberation—as though she wished to impress the act upon all who witnessed it.

Stephanie instantly returned it in just the way it was given—with precisely the same manner and deliberation. Then a little mocking smile crept into her eyes and lingered.

"I know it is bad taste to comment on what does not concern one," Marcia remarked, "but do you quite appreciate the honor that has been done you?"

"I understand the honor—even if I don't appreciate it," Stephanie replied. "It is the first indication that the icebergs are preparing to melt."

"I love the way you first ignored her, and then acknowledged her bow with a manner that was a perfect replica of her own," Marcia laughed.

"Are you going home?" Stephanie asked, when they were drawing on their gloves; "and have you your own car here? No?—well, won't you let me drop you on my way?"

"Indeed, I will," said Marcia. "Mother took the machine and left me to the tender mercies of the street car."

As they came out of the store, two men who were passing took off their hats and bowed most deferentially.

"Who were they?" asked Stephanie, as the car started.

"Charles Porshinger, on the outside—and Henry

Murchison," Marcia answered, with a look of quick surprise.

"They must be new people—at least, I've never heard of them."

"They've been in society about a year—they both belong to the nice clubs, and are not married."

"It's comparatively easy for an unmarried man to get in," Stephanie observed. "All that he needs is to present a good appearance and to have a friend or two to vouch for him."

"And if he happens to have money, it is pretty easy to—get the friends!" Marcia smiled.

Stephanie nodded. "To *buy* the friends, you were about to say. Yes, it *is* easy now-a-days—entirely too easy."

Then she suddenly thought what she was saying and to whom—and stopped.

But Marcia only laughed—and answered:

"Father is married—and has a daughter. We're in another class, and we're a bit—acclimated now."

"And that daughter," said Stephanie heartily, "has made good—you belong!"

"Mrs. Lorraine," began Marcia presently, "I don't want to seem impertinent, but did you really intend me to infer, from what you said as we came out of Partridge's, that you did not know Porshinger or Murchison?"

"Yes indeed," Stephanie replied. "I not only don't know them, but I have no recollection even of having seen them prior to to-day. Why do you ask?"

"I will tell you," said Marcia—"and you may make out of it what you can. Last evening I was up

at the Club-house until rather late, and four or five of us were sitting in a sheltered place on the North piazza. While we were there, Porshinger and Murchison came out and sat down just around the corner. After a short while all of our party went in except Mr. Burgoyne and myself—and he was called, a moment after, to the telephone. Left alone I could not but hear Porshinger's and Murchison's talk. We had been making a good deal of noise, and they evidently thought from the silence that we all had gone in. But however that is, I heard Murchison say:

"'Is there anything new in the Lorraine matter?'

"'Not much,' said Porshinger. 'The thing is coming along though, never fear. Pendleton, the snob, is not invulnerable. I've found a way to reach him, and it's only a matter of a little time till he will be having troubles of his own—and Mrs. Lorraine also.'

"'Better leave well enough alone,' Murchison cautioned.

"'That may be your way—it's not mine!' retorted the other. 'They started the fight, now I'm going to accommodate them. They will think merry hell has broke loose before I'm through with them.'

"Then Mr. Burgoyne returned and I heard no more. Can you understand it?"

Stephanie shook her head.

"I can not," she said—"but possibly Mr. Pendleton can explain it. I shall tell him, if you don't mind, the next time I see him."

"Tell him by all means," Marcia responded. "You have my permission."

X

AT CRISS-CROSS

Criss-Cross, the Chamberlain country place, was two hours out by a fast train. Mrs. Chamberlain had been dead a number of years and Gladys presided over her father's establishment with the ease of careful training and the assurance of an only child.

She met Stephanie at the station when the latter arrived late that afternoon, and they drove back to Criss-Cross by a round-about way that stretched the two miles into twenty—during which Gladys learned all the happenings of the last week in town, particularly the present attitude of the Queen P's and their followers, resultant from Lorraine's accident and Stephanie's behaviour incident thereto with the prospect of their reconciliation.

"Marcia Emerson seems to be an exceedingly nice girl," Stephanie observed. "Two years have done wonders for her."

Gladys nodded.

"Marcia is a dear!" she replied. "She's a good sport in everything, and she is something to look at besides. The two years that you were away have made her. I don't blame the men for being crazy about her. The only drawback she has is her mother. She's a pusher. She thinks she's put Marcia in society, whereas Marcia has come in naturally, and the old lady rides on her train, so to speak. I can't abide

Mrs. Emerson! To me she has about every obnoxious fault of her class. Old Emerson is not half so bad; he is honest and amusing—and the men like him, I understand. I've asked Marcia down to-morrow, for the week-end—you don't mind, I hope."

"Not in the least—if *she* doesn't mind me," said Stephanie.

"She knows you are to be here. Mrs. Emerson, however, may throw a fit when she knows it!" Gladys laughed.

"Is any one else coming?" Stephanie asked.

"Just a few—your friends, of course: Dorothy Tazewell, and Helen Burleston, with Montague Pendleton, Sheldon Burgoyne, Warwick Devereux and Steuart Cameron. Two tables of Auction, you know—and plenty of go to the crowd."

"Mayn't I be a wet blanket?" Stephanie suggested.

"Why?" was the astonished query.

"Do they also know I'm coming? They may not care to be housed up with me for two days."

"Sure they know. You're too timid, my dear—when did it come on you?"

"Abroad, I reckon," Stephanie replied. "I appear cold and calm enough, but it's all bluff, Gladys. The truth is, I'm scared to death."

"I shouldn't care to pick you for a dead one!" Gladys laughed. "You have a way about you, my dear, that is rather chilling when you choose to make it so. You know what we used to call you—The Disconcerter."

"That was before I——" she paused. "Now *I'm* the one who is disconcerted—inwardly at least."

"Assuredly it's not outwardly," Gladys declared.

"I hope it isn't—but you never can tell when I shall fail to carry it off. I am always thinking—whenever I'm talking to anyone or walking the street—what must be in the other's mind: Amherst and me."

"Forget it, Stephaine—forget it!" Gladys exclaimed.

"I only wish I could."

"*Don't* think of it."

"I don't believe it's possible."

"Make it possible."

"How?"

"By making yourself interested in some one else—and some one else interested in you."

Stephanie looked at her friend with an incredulous smile.

"The latter ought not to be especially difficult," Gladys went on—"as to the former, it depends upon yourself."

"Would you suggest a married man?" Stephanie asked.

"Married or single, it makes no difference; though the single man is unattached and easier to make obey orders."

"And what of Lorraine?"

"Lorraine isn't worth considering—he doesn't count."

"I grant you that, but——"

"Oh, I know, you're tied by law—but you're free in fact."

"Perhaps!" reflected Stephanie.

"Moreover, there is no earthly reason why you should let Lorraine interfere with your enjoyment of life," Gladys went on. "I assume that you don't intend to repeat the—other experiment—so why shouldn't you do as you please, so long as that pleasure doesn't transgress the proprieties."

"You know I was at the Hospital?" said Stephanie.

"Yes—the night of the accident."

"And again to-day."

"I call it very considerate in you," Gladys declared.

"Maybe you don't know that Harry has offered to take me back."

"I didn't know it—but I'm not surprised. He always is doing things too late. You're not going back?"

Stephanie shook her head.

"No—I'm not going back—ever," said she.

"Have you told him?"

"Yes—before the accident, not since."

"He is just silly enough to fancy that his mishap and your visits to the Hospital have changed your decision," Gladys remarked.

"Not likely. My visits were very brief and—calm."

"The Disconcerter!" Gladys laughed.

"I tried to be—distant," Stephanie confessed.

"Then you succeeded—I can't imagine anyone presuming after that."

"The difficulty is you are not Mr. Lorraine."

"To my mind the whole difficulty is Lorraine himself," Gladys declared. "If he were half a man your trouble never would have started. You were about as well fitted for each other as—pardon me—an eagle and a chicken. The only thing surprising is the length of time you hung together. Of course, it's a pity you didn't select some other way out—but I don't know that it's not the natural way, after all. Only——"

"Why did I choose Amherst, you mean?" remarked Stephanie quietly. "I don't exactly know. Propinquity, opportunity—perversity—especially the last."

"But more especially because he is a slick-tongued scoundrel with the odor of eminent respectability and a perfectly fascinating way with women," said Gladys.

They were mounting a steep hill. Near the crest, she threw quickly into second; and when they were over it went back again into high.

"What started us on this subject anyway?" she exclaimed. "I beg your pardon, dear—I never thought what I was saying."

"Nonsense!" smiled Stephanie. "I don't mind in the least—with you. Truth is, I rather like it. Harry Lorraine is nothing to me—and never can be. I'm not sensitive because he happens to be my husband. My poor judgment in making him such is too apparent for me to deny that I was a fool—neither can I deny that I took the worst possible way out of a bad bar-

gain by running away with Amherst. I admit I've been headstrong and willful and everything else idiotic. That possibly is my saving grace—my readiness to admit it—after it is too late. I suppose Society will consider him marvellously magnanimous in offering to take me back, and me a stupendously silly woman in declining. In fact, it won't believe that such a thing is possible. It already assumes that a reconciliation is to be effected. Mrs. Postlewaite was willing to speak to me to-day, and Mrs. Porterfield actually did bow."

"You are coming along!" Gladys laughed. "The Queen P's having indicated—it is for their followers to do likewise."

"What will they do, however, when they know the truth?" Stephanie inquired.

"Stampede—if they haven't committed themselves too far."

"They haven't—it was a tentative recognition only."

"It's perfectly absurd for two old women to set themselves up as the absolute arbiters of who shall be in it, and what shall be done to stay in—and for Society as a class to follow them abjectly," Gladys declared. "They are the high priestesses of the Conventional; and it's the fear of transgressing and being cast into outer darkness that holds every one to their narrow-minded ritual. I'm ashamed for my sex—they're so like sheep. They follow blindly after the leaders who in turn follow their fetish, the Customary; and it's useless to hope for a change. We've always done it; I reckon we always will do it—and those of

us who aren't tractable and won't submit are viewed with suspicion, and may be driven without the fold if we transgress too far. I'm thinking of starting a society of my own, in which the members will attend to their own business so long as they don't interfere with property rights. I'm inclined to think it would be mighty popular—especially among the younger set."

"There isn't a doubt of it," Stephanie agreed, with an amused smile. "Suppose we suggest it to the rest—the Order of Do as You Please—we will call it."

"You don't need suggest it to the men—they belong already. No one controls them. I wish I were a man!"

"You do quite well as you are—and are a lot more worth while," said Stephanie. "You can get a dozen men, my dear. Which one have you picked out for yourself, in the present instance?"

"I hadn't thought!" she laughed. "Pendleton is for you, of course—that is all I know now."

"Why of course?" said Stephanie.

"You can answer that better than I."

"Not *your* reasons, my dear."

"Do you object to Montague being allotted to you?" Gladys asked, with a sly smile.

"Not in the least——"

"And do you fancy *he* will have the slightest objection?"

"You will have to ask him."

"I'm asking for *your opinion*, not for his."

"Montague is very adaptable," Stephanie remarked.

"Adaptable!" cried Gladys. "He may be *now*—he hasn't been in the *recent* past. Your influence has evidently been softening—I shouldn't have thought of asking him if it hadn't been for you."

"Thank Heaven, I've a softening influence on some one," said Stephanie.

"Without a doubt—yes."

They were starting down a long, steep and winding grade. She cut off the spark, threw into second and opening the throttle let the gas shoot into the cylinders to cool the engine.

"My recommendation that you get some one interested in you is rather unnecessary under the circumstances, don't you think?" she remarked.

"How about my getting interested in some one?" Stephanie inquired.

"On second thought, it is not necessary—and it is better that you shouldn't. You can handle Pendleton much more easily if your affections are not engaged—except in a rational way."

"You might explain what you would call a 'rational way'!"

"I can't be specific!" Gladys laughed; "rationality depends on the circumstances of every case—and the individual view."

"Which is a trifle difficult to analyze," Stephanie remarked.

"Don't you wish to have Montague assigned to you?" the other demanded. "I'll give him to Dorothy, if you don't—she will be content."

"Won't you have some trouble in giving Mon-

tague to anybody—unless he's entirely willing to be given?" Stephanie smiled. "He isn't one to stay put, I fancy—whose place is this?" she ended, indicating a garish country-house, some little distance back from the road. "It is new, isn't it?"

"As new as the people who own it," Gladys answered. "The Woodsides live there. They belong to the Pushers Clique—and they are trying to pry their way through the outer portals. I don't like them."

"So I should infer," said Stephanie. "Who are their friends?"

"They haven't any—yet. They're trying to get in—nobody has any friends until they're in, my dear—and not many after they're in. They're pirates until the second generation."

"Do they belong to the Club?"

"Yes—that's no recommendation *now*."

"I think I don't know them!" Stephanie reflected.

"Of course you don't. They came up from the weeds recently—along with Porshinger and Murchison and Berryman and their ilk."

"Who are Porshinger and Murchison?" Stephanie asked.

"Bounders. Plenty of money and an unlimited supply of brass. You know the sort. They are friends of the Woodsides and are down here very often. You may be afforded a view of them to-morrow."

"I saw them to-day—they spoke to Marcia Emerson as we were leaving Partridge's."

"Well, did you see much?" remarked Gladys.

"I saw two men—well groomed and superficially presentable."

"You saw it all then—you won't care to go deeper."

"You say they have money?"

"Great wads of it."

"What is their business?"

"Capitalists and professional directors," Gladys replied. "They are on about every important Board in town—including the Tuscarora Trust Company."

"Where did they make it?"

"Oil—principally and first. Afterward they made it everywhere. I think they must coin it, to tell you the truth. If you sold them a piece of swamp and scrub oak, gold would be discovered on it the next day. They're buying their way into Society; already they seem to regard it as an asset to be realized on. It is only a matter of time until they capitalize it, issue bonds on it, and have the stock for their own profit—you understand?"

"Not exactly!" laughed Stephanie, "but I catch your idea: They are exceedingly objectionable and offensively rich."

"Exactly!—and not a lot more beside. They are worse than bounders, they're muckers. That is about the meanest, most contemptible thing one man can call another, isn't it?"

It was easy to see that Gladys reflected her father's opinion of Porshinger and Murchison, and it disturbed Stephanie. If one of Mr. Chamberlain's disposition

so considered them, then, beyond question, they were a bad lot and she must warn Montague at the earliest moment. She could not understand how Pendleton and she had offended—when she had not even so much as a recollection of ever having seen them before to-day. And it was a joint offence, at least she was joined in it someway, for they had distinctly mentioned her name and included her in their meditated revenge—that is, Porshinger had included her, Murchison, as she remembered, had been against it.

"This Mr. Porshinger," she said—"is he particularly vindictive?"

"Vindictive?" was Gladys' puzzled interrogation.

"That is a bit strong, maybe. Unforgiving—unrelenting, is better."

"Why do you ask?" the other inquired.

"I just wanted to know."

"So one would naturally suppose," said Gladys. "However, I did hear a man, whom I consider thoroughly discriminating, say one day recently that he regarded Porshinger as vindictive as an Apache and as cruel, without conscience and without mercy. Is that sufficiently definite?"

"Appallingly so!" Stephanie replied.

"Do you mind telling me who has fallen under his displeasure?"

"I have."

"You!" cried Gladys. "Why you said you didn't even know him—that you had never seen him before to-day."

"Precisely!"

"Then will you tell me what you mean?"

"I will tell you what I was told—you can help me guess what it means," she answered.

And she told her.

"It surely is astonishing!" was Gladys' comment when she had heard Stephanie's tale. "It's true to the worst they say about him—to strike at a man through a woman! or rather to strike at you because somehow you are involved in the injury which Montague appears to have done him. Tell Montague at once—he will know what it means and he should be warned. Can't you imagine what it is?"

"I haven't an idea," said Stephanie.

"Strange!" reflected Gladys, with a serious shake of her head. "You are intimately concerned, it seems, and yet you haven't done a thing. Well, we shall have to wait for Montague to solve the riddle."

She surmised that it had something to do with Stephanie's return—that she was the *casus belli*—but she did not suggest it. And Stephanie, while thinking the same, did not voice it; it seemed too far fetched. Moreover, it was predicated on Pendleton's voluntary defense of her in her absence. And the latter, she thought, would be assuming much more than the circumstances warranted, and would make her appear exceedingly well satisfied of his regard.

"You're very fortunate to have been warned thus early," Gladys continued. "Montague will have time to prepare—at least, he won't be taken completely unawares. Father knows Porshinger in business, and he says that if a man gets the best of him to the

extent of a nickel, he will square off though it takes a year. Of course I know that a man's method in business isn't necessarily carried into his private life, but Porshinger does not come under that class."

"How about Murchison?" Stephanie asked.

"Not quite so bad—he is rather better mannered and has more feeling. The conversation that Marcia detailed illustrates the difference between the men, I should say. Murchison was for letting well enough alone—which only seemed to make Porshinger the more determined."

"On the whole, Porshinger must be a very pleasant fellow to have camping on one's trail!" smiled Stephanie. "I'm curious to hear Montague's opinion."

"I'd rather hear him express it to a *man*—it would likely be a trifle more picturesque!" Gladys laughed.

"What can Porshinger do?" Stephanie asked.

"What *can't* he do with all his money and financial influence! God is on the side of the heaviest bank account."

"All things being equal, I grant it; but there is a wide difference between Montague Pendleton and Charles Porshinger as men—and I've faith in the blood. It will win, Gladys, it will win."

"Blood doesn't count for much in these automobile pace days," Gladys responded. "It is the money that talks."

"Blood counts for much in such a contest."

"Not where money is the basis of everything ex-

cept eligibility to hereditary societies of the self-glorification stripe."

"You're too pessimistic!" laughed Stephanie.

"My dear, you haven't a father who is an officer in the Tuscarora Trust Company—and you haven't seen the men who visit him. It's a sad commentary on what we are coming to—and the elevation of the parvenu. Let's change the subject. I'm becoming excited; the next thing I'll ditch the car, or run into a telegraph pole."

"Heaven forefend!" exclaimed Stephanie.

A little later, as they spun down the macadam near the Criss-Cross gates, they passed a station-wagon drawn by a spanking pair of bays.

The man in it took off his hat and bowed.

"There is Porshinger now!" said Stephanie.

Gladys nodded. "He has come out to spend the night at the Woodsides', I reckon—it's their conveyance."

XI

THE OVERTON MEADOW

"I SEE the Lorraine woman is with Gladys Chamberlain," observed Porshinger, as he and his host were enjoying a good-night smoke in the billiard room, and incidentally knocking the balls about.

"Hum!" replied Woodside, as he made a neat gather along the rail. "When did you see her—come down on the same train?"

"No—passed them in the car, as I came from the station. What's she going to do—make it up with Lorraine, if he recovers?"

"Search me!" answered the other. "Will he have her?"

"You're a little behind, Josh—everybody knows that he has offered and she's undecided."

"Well, I wish him success. She's a damn good looking woman—better looking even than when she ran away with Amherst—don't you think so? Oh! I forgot you didn't know her then."

Porshinger shot a sharp look down the table—and followed it with a smile.

"I don't know her now—to speak to," he said. "But I have no trouble in recollecting two years back—and I quite agree with you. She is even better looking now. I don't wonder that she turned Amherst's head."

"It's a cold head, she turned!" Woodside laughed.

"I fancy she found it out soon enough, and that they had a parrot and monkey time of it until they broke finally. The ways of the transgressor are full of punctures."

"You refer to only one sort of transgressors, I imagine," Porshinger remarked, with a thinly veiled contempt.

"Yes at that moment I did," said his host indifferently; "but it applies to every one—you and me included," and he steadied himself for a massè.

"You know the Chamberlains well enough to—happen in?" asked Porshinger presently.

"Want to meet the statuesque beauty—hey?" Woodside laughed.

Porshinger nodded.

"She does rather appeal to one," Woodside confessed. "If I weren't married, I think I would take a flyer myself."

"Don't let that stop you—marriage is no disqualification with her; she's proven it."

"She has proven it *once*—she will be mighty careful not to let it happen again," said Woodside.

"To the extent of running away, yes," Porshinger sneered. "Otherwise she is but wiser in the *savoir faire*, so to speak."

"That is a damn cynical way of looking at it, Porshinger!"

"You're welcome to your view, my friend," the other shrugged.

"You pays your money and you takes your choice," commented Woodside.

"There is no possible doubt about you paying your money," Porshinger assured dryly. "She will come high."

"If she is in the market—that is," Woodside amended.

"Most women," sneered Porshinger, as he clicked the balls down the rail, "have their price—even Mrs. Lorraine."

"Well, that need be no obstacle to you," Woodside retorted. "You have the price. What you haven't got is the girl—can you get her?"

"My dear fellow, I don't know yet that I want her."

His host laughed lightly.

"You want to look her over first," he said. "I understand. Well if you do want her I wish you luck. I should hesitate about going up against that chilly beauty—she can make you feel like thirty cents if she's so minded."

"She'll not have a chance to make me feel like thirty cents, depend on it," Porshinger boasted.

"You evidently don't know her," Woodside remarked.

"Do you know her?" his guest inquired.

"I've seen her at the Club, and she has the grand manner—such as you read about in books. She can humble you with a look, patronize you with a smile, humiliate you with a frown."

"She must be a wonderful woman!" Porshinger laughed. "I'm anxious to meet her."

"Well, we may happen over to-morrow evening

and you can see whether it's to be a freeze or a thaw. I'm rather inclined to the notion that it will be a freeze—and a fairly hard one, too."

"You're a cheerful sort of sponsor," Porshinger remarked. "Better not risk your reputation as a prophet of evil."

"Don't make me your sponsor!" Woodside exclaimed. "I told you I didn't know Mrs. Lorraine."

"You know Gladys Chamberlain, don't you?"

"Yes—in a sort of way. I think she and Mrs. Woodside exchange calls, once a season, down here—not in town. Why don't you work old Chamberlain—you're in the Tuscarora with him?"

"That will serve as an additional excuse for the 'happen in.' I want the meeting to be casual—without any suggestion of pre-arrangement."

Woodside nodded.

"All right!" he agreed. "We'll try it—but what the lady may do to you is quite another question."

"Which we will let the future determine," replied Porshinger, as he clicked up the last point.

There was one thing, at least, about Porshinger that was normal—his love of country life. Incident to this was his fondness for taking long walks in the early morning—a characteristic not at all accordant with his present station. He acquired it in the days when his occupation in the oil fields made it the regular manner of life.

Seven o'clock the following morning saw him on the highway, clad in knickerbockers and stout shoes, a

Panama pulled down over his eyes and a light stick in his hand.

It was a glorious early summer day, with just a line of haze along the distant hills; the air was soft with the breath of the open country; the dew was still heavy on grass and shrub. As he swung along, whistling merrily as a school boy on his way to a vacation-day frolic, he did not in the remotest degree suggest the cold, hard man of finance, compared to whom an arctic night is as a torrid afternoon. It was the one occasion on which he permitted himself to relax and be entirely natural.

Presently, away off in front on the macadam road, he noticed a pedestrian—who, as he slowly decreased the distance, was resolved into a woman—and, as he gradually overtook her, into a tall, willowy figure, in a short walking skirt, high tan shoes lacing well up the leg, and a small Continental hat, set at a rakish angle.

"Who is it?" he kept asking himself—and then there came a sharp turn in the road and he recognized her.

It was Stephanie Lorraine.

A momentary smile of satisfaction crossed his lips, and he extended his stride a trifle. Here was an opportunity, better than any of Woodside's devising, for him to make her acquaintance—quite by accident and altogether informally. And for her to snub him, if she were so minded, with no one but themselves to witness it nor to remember.

He came up with her a little farther on. As she

glanced casually at him he raised his hat and said, bowing and pausing as he did so:

"Good morning, Mrs. Lorraine!"

Stephanie knew who had been behind—she had heard his quick, sharp step a long way back and had contrived, as only a woman can, to see who it was without betraying that she had seen. And she had decided what she would do, if he overtook her,—and she was intending that he should overtake her—and speak; also what she would do if, by any chance, he did not speak.

"Good morning, sir," she replied.

It was politely indifferent, yet at the same time courteous. It neither repelled, repressed nor invited.

"It is a charming morning," said he, appraising the situation as he saw it.

It was just as he had anticipated. She had no thought of snubbing *him*—she was very well content to take him as one of the circle to which she belonged, and to treat him accordingly.

"Perfectly lovely!" she answered.

He shortened his steps, so that he remained a trifle in advance and appeared to be slowly passing her.

"It's the cream of the day, to me," he said—"particularly at this season of the year. I don't know that I should call it so *all* the year."

"No!" she said. "Nor I—here in the North."

She saw what was coming—and it came.

"If I present myself to you properly, may I walk along?" he smiled—"we're going the same road, it seems."

"Are you willing to be sponsor for yourself?" she smiled back.

"Only in exceptional instances," he bowed and removed his hat. "Permit me to present Charles Porshinger to Mrs. Lorraine!"

She held out her hand.

"I'm glad to meet Mr. Porshinger," she said.

He fell back into step with her and they swung along, appraising each other while they talked—only Stephanie's appraisal was also with a woman's natural intuition. And the more she appraised him the less she liked him, but the more she set herself to win him—slowly and discreetly, as a clever woman knows so well how to do. And for all his shrewdness in the affairs of men, he was as a child in the ways of women.

Presently they came to a stile and Stephanie paused.

"I leave the highway here," she said. "I go back through the fields—there is a path running around the hill. Do you know it?"

"No—but I should like to know it," he invited. "Won't you show it to me?"

"It will take you out of your course!" she suggested.

"I have no course this morning but the one you fix," he said.

"Take care, *m'sieur!*" she warned. "I may be a poor—navigator."

"I'll risk it, *madame*—both your skill as a pilot and your ability as a captain."

She shot him a look from under her long lashes.

"Very well," she replied and sprang lightly to the stile.

He was before her at the steps, however, with hand extended to help her. . . . For just an instant, her fingers rested in his; then dropped them, and she was over. A faint smile touched his lips as he followed.

The path was scarcely wide enough for two; and the high grass on either side confined it even more, so that he was perforce obliged to walk just a shade behind—and talking is difficult when one precedes the other. But it gave him a fine opportunity to observe the woman before him, and he made the best of it.

The morning sun was spinning her auburn hair to gleaming copper, and beneath the dead white of her cheek the blood pulsed faintly pink. The trim, slender figure was, for all its seeming listlessness, alive with latent energy and spirit—her shoulders, even under her jacket, he could see were beautifully proportioned, her neck was slender and long, but not too long—and her feet, even in the heavy shoes, were slim and arched, and she put them down *well—distinctly well.* A subtle perfume floated back to him, and he found himself bending forward to catch a fuller fragrance. Then the path widened and, half turning, she waited for him to draw up.

"This path evidently wasn't made by the socially inclined," he said.

"It wasn't. It was made originally by the cattle which pastured here—and do so still," she added, as they passed a copse of trees and undergrowth and

came upon a herd of a dozen cows with a brawny bull at their head.

The latter, at the sight of the two strangers who were invading his domain, flung up his head and stared at them with a distinctly hostile air.

"His Majesty does not seem pleased with us!" she laughed.

"No—I should say we don't make a favorable impression, judging from his attitude," he answered, glancing carelessly toward the animals.

"He's not properly appreciative of the honor you do him, Mr. Porshinger," she remarked.

He did not quite like the words—he thought he detected just a touch of irony; but she flashed him a smile from her lash-shaded eyes, and the suspicion vanished.

"He doesn't want any one poaching on his pasture," he said.

The bull suddenly put down its head, pawed the earth, and bellowed.

"I think we would better hurry," she remarked, quickening her step.

"It's only a protest!" he laughed. "He is like the average man—he makes plenty of fuss and racket but doesn't do anything that *will really* correct the trouble. And the trouble continues—just as we are doing."

Another bellow, and fiercer, came from the bull—and he began to trot slowly toward them.

"He's coming!" exclaimed Stephanie, beginning to run.

"Make for the nearest fence!" counselled Porshinger, and stopped.

The bull kept straight on until he was within a few feet of Porshinger—then he paused, pawed the earth again, and let out another bellow.

Stephanie, glancing over her shoulder, saw the situation and halted.

"Come on, Mr. Porshinger!" she called.

"Get over the fence!" he answered sharply, not taking his eyes off the angry beast.

"I shall get to the fence when you——"

The rest was drowned in the voice of the bull. He let out a terrific roar and charged straight at the man before him.

Stephanie gave a shriek of terror.

Porshinger sprang swiftly aside—and the bull tossed the air instead of the man. When his head came up he saw only Stephanie in front of him, and bellowing again he bore down upon her at full speed.

"Run! Run!" cried Porshinger, as he raced across the field in pursuit.

Stephanie stood as if petrified.

"*Run!*" yelled Porshinger again. "*For the love of God, run!*"

With the enraged brute almost upon her, she came suddenly to life. Sweeping up her narrow skirts above her knees, she turned and fled. She could hear the thundering of the hoofs behind her, and drawing closer and closer, while the fence seemed far, far away. She heard Porsinger's cries, and knew that he was trying to divert the bull and to help her in the only

way he could. The fence was nearer now—and so were the hoof-beats behind her. She dared not glance back —and yet the temptation was well-nigh irresistible. How close was the bull! How close was the bull!— Would she reach the fence in time?—Would she reach the fence in time?—

It was well for Stephanie that she was fond of athletics and sports and was still given to taking regular exercise. And she ran as she had never run, her breath coming in gasps—corsets are not made for such strenuosity—until the blood seemed to congest in her head and her heart, and black spots floated before her eyes. There was a last frightful moment— the hoof-beats were pounding at her heels—the fence was just ahead, a stout rail fence.—Would she reach it?—could she spring over it if she did reach it?

Then her hands closed upon a post. And not caring how she managed it, nor what might be the exposè, she sprang somehow—and fell—and got across just as the bull came crashing into the panel. Then she collapsed in a heap on the ground, while the huge beast roared and foamed in baffled rage a few feet distant.

As Porshinger vaulted the fence farther down, Stephanie recovered herself and, pushing down her skirts, sat up.

"You're not hurt?" he cried breathlessly.

"Not hurt—except in my vanity!" she laughed. "*It's* punctured badly."

"Just so *you* aren't punctured," he returned. "It was a close call! You and the bull were right together

at the fence—I couldn't tell whether *he* tossed you over, or whether you jumped. You looked as though——"

"Please forget how I looked!" she smiled. "And hand me my hat. Now if you will you may help me up.—Thank you, Mr. Porshinger."

She was seriously shaken, and he saw it.

"Come over and sit down," he said, leading her toward a rock near by. "You will feel better for a moment's rest."

"No—I'm all right," she answered;—"but I *will* sit down until I've put on my hat. It's a fortunate thing the fence held. Ough!" she shivered, with a glance at the bull, who was still pawing the ground in baffled rage, and frothing at the mouth. "It was a fearful feeling with those awful horns just behind me, and expecting every instant to be gored and tossed."

"It must have been fearful," he sympathized.

"Why is it," she said with a quizzical smile, "that a woman is always afraid of a bull and a mouse?"

"They wish to be extreme, I fancy!" he laughed.

"Also there is a lot between a bull and a mouse that they are afraid of!" she added.

"Animate or inanimate?" he asked.

"Both," she answered.

Her hair was awry and she straightened it as best she could, removing her gloves to do it the better.

He remarked the long, slender fingers, with the filbert nails and the crescents shining at their base—and he stole a look at his own ill-shaped hand, with

its thick, formless, heavy-pointed fingers and hairy back. For the first time he regretted the difference.

Her hair temporarily put to rights, she stuck the pins—which were scattered on the ground and which Porshinger collected for her—in her cocked hat, and fastened it into place. Then she got up, suffered him to brush the dust and dirt from her clothes—she helping—and they resumed the walk.

"Adieu, your Taurus Majesty!" she called, with a farewell wave of her hand toward the still indignant and frowning bull.

"I'll see that he is killed to-day," Porshinger volunteered.

"Indeed, you'll not," she said. "He was defending his own pasture and his own kind. You would have done the same if you were a bull."

Porshinger winced despite himself. There was something distinctly unpleasant in the comparison. She had not called him a bull. Yet that, doubtless, was what she considered him—uncouth and untamed, not broken to polite society.

"I suppose so," he said thoughtfully. "It may be an apt comparison."

"What is an apt comparison?" she asked.

"Comparing me to the bull!"

"Preserve me then from you, if it is apt!" she laughed. "I want no more bulls in mine."

Was he making sport of her or was he serious, she wondered?—and could not decide. Reading his every action through her knowledge of his declared purpose to injure Pendleton and her, she was prone to sus-

picion. True, he had done what he could to save her from the bull's attack, but any man, were he only half a man, could not have done less.

"Is that an invocation?" he asked.

She looked at him questioningly.

"Is a bull amenable to invocation?" she replied. "Will he withhold his attack if you pray—very hard?"

She had touched the matter rather closely; and he, not knowing that she knew, was puzzled at its significance. While she, seeing that she had ventured almost too far, tactfully changed the conversation.

They regained the highway, a little farther on, and tramped rapidly homeward. At the entrance to Criss-Cross, Stephanie stopped and held out her hand.

"It is too early in the morning to ask you in," she said. "My hostess won't be visible as yet. She's not an early rambler—like we are, Mr. Porshinger. Thank you for saving me from that horrid bull."

"And a less strenuous time on our next walk," he replied, bowing awkwardly over her hand. "You do walk 'most every morning, don't you, Mrs. Lorraine?"

"Every morning that it is convenient," she answered.

"Will it be convenient to-morrow morning?" he asked.

"Not to-morrow," she replied. "I've something else on," and with a little nod she turned away and went up the drive to the house.

"Send my breakfast up in half an hour," she said to the butler, as she passed through the hall.

Once in her room, she rang for a maid, got out of her dusty walking suit and into the grateful shower bath—having first protected her hair with a rubber cap. Then she dressed, put on a flowing silk kimono, and went in to her breakfast, which the servant was just laying on the table by the window.

In the midst of it, there was a knock on the door and Gladys entered.

"Had your breakfast?" Stephanie inquired.

"An hour ago," Gladys replied. "You take the early morning hours to walk; I take them for my correspondence and household orders. You win this time—it was a beautiful morning. Where did you go?"

"Out the Churchville road, across the path through the Overton property to the Henrystown road, and home."

"The path through the Overton property!" exclaimed Gladys. "I forgot to warn you that they are using those fields for pasturing cattle, with a vicious bull among them. Did you see him?"

"Yes, we saw him," Stephanie answered, buttering a roll.

"Did he come close?"

"Fairly close!"

"Weren't you frightened?" Gladys asked.

"A trifle."

"I should have been scared stiff."

"On the contrary," said Stephanie, tapping an egg with the tip of her spoon, "I think you would

have been scared into the quickest action you have ever known."

"What do you mean?" Gladys demanded.

"I mean that you would have made a record run for the fence," slowly measuring the salt.

"Is that what you did?"

"Precisely what I did—and I just made it."

"You just made what?"

"The fence."

"Do you mean the bull actually attacked you?"

"No—he didn't get quite close enough to *actually* attack—he missed me by the fraction of a hair. I went over the fence just as he banged into it. We had a nerve-racking finish—the bull and I. I won it by an eyelash."

Gladys laughed merrily.

"Your pardon, dear! But I really can't help it—the idea of you and Overton's bull sprinting it across the field! It's too ridiculous. And you won, dear, you won!" She laughed again. "All the bull could do was to stand at the fence and look."

"If he had any sense of propriety he *didn't* look," Stephanie remarked—"especially when I was going over. I must have resembled a Broadway beauty chorus."

"And no one but the bull on the ball-headed row!" Gladys bubbled.

"Possibly—I was in too much haste to observe whether Mr. Porshinger saw or not."

"Porshinger!" cried Gladys. "Porshinger!

What in Heaven's name was he doing in Overton's pasture?"

"Walking with me!" was the demure reply.

"Walking with you!—Stephanie Lorraine, will you explain yourself?"

"Sure!" said Stephanie, and explained.

At the end, Gladys selected a tiny gold-tipped cigarette from the case on the dressing table and carefully lighted it.

"What is your plan?" she asked, from back of a thin cloud of smoke.

"I haven't any plan," Stephanie replied, pouring herself another cup of coffee. "It was only a reconnoissance, made on the spur of the moment——"

"Made on the horns of the bull! I should say," Gladys smiled. "What is your next move?"

"I don't know."

"Do you want me to ask him to Criss-Cross?"

"No—not yet."

"Well—if you do, I'll ask him," said Gladys. "We're in this thing to win, you know. But it would not be wise, I think, to have him and Montague Pendleton at the same time."

"No, decidedly no!" said Stephanie—"at least, for the present."

XII

A MATTER OF LIGHT

PENDLETON was late in arriving at Criss-Cross. He was the last of the party to come in, and he hastened to the quarters, the servant showed him, in the bachelor end over the billiard room in a separate angle of the house.

Once there, he flung off his business suit, plunged through his bath, flourished his safety, cutting himself in his haste (who ever saw a safety that was safe?) and then proceeded to dash into the clothes laid out for him.

"Damn!" he exclaimed forcefully, as a stud that had been insecurely fastened slipped from its hole and retired gracefully under the bureau.

He was down on his knees searching for it when there was a knock on his door.

"Come in!" he shouted, without looking up.

Sheldon Burgoyne entered, stopped a moment with a quizzical smile, and without a word sat down. It was not a time for speech—*on his part.*

Pendleton presently retrieved the stud and arose, red in the face and angry.

"Why didn't you say something?" he demanded.

"I thought it was a time to be quiet," Burgoyne replied.

Pendleton paused, with the stud half in, and looked at him.

"Hum!" he grunted. "You *do* have a glimmering of sense, it seems! Why is it, if you drop a stud or a collar button in a room a hundred feet square with only one piece of furniture in the place, the infernal thing will dash under it? Talk of a chicken, or a mule, or a pig—they're not in it with the article under discussion."

"So I have observed!" Burgoyne remarked. "The chap who invents a non-hiding stud will make his everlasting fortune. Of course, the reason for the seemingly peculiar is perfectly evident—it is the law of direction and applied force, that's all. I'll illustrate it on you, if you wish."

"It is not at all necessary!" said Pendleton. "Is every one here, I wonder."

"Yes—you're the laggard—you're generally the laggard.—Why didn't you ever marry, Pendleton?"

"Because I was too much occupied attending to my own business," Pendleton answered.

"I had never observed it!" the other grinned.

"There is nothing peculiar about that—you never observe anything but the ladies."

"Do you criticise my taste?"

"Far be it from me!" Pendleton laughed. "Who are here—do you know?"

"Dorothy Tazewell, Helen Burleston and Marcia Emerson, the men are Steuart Cameron and Warwick Devereux. We all came down on the same train. Stephanie Lorraine, I understand, came yesterday."

"Thank heaven, it is a congenial crowd! How is Miss Emerson—as fascinatingly pretty as ever?"

"More so!—More so!" exclaimed Burgoyne. "She is pushing Stephanie hard for first place," with a bland smile—which Pendleton saw but did not remark.

That he had admired Stephanie Mourraille was no secret, Pendleton knew; and that the admiration had not decreased since she had become Stephanie Lorraine, Society could very readily infer. For his part, he did not care what they inferred; and when he had intimated to Stephanie that he might be coming around her too much, she had put her hand on his shoulder—he could feel it there now—and had asked him, if *he* objected? Her inference was too plain to miss and he said no more—at the time—though he felt a bit culpable for not doing it.

"How are you and Devereux hitting it?" he asked, to shift the talk.

"Not in time!" smiled Burgoyne,—"not at all in time. It's like a two-step and a schottische."

"Who's doing the schottische?"

"Both—at different periods. Miss Emerson is the only one who is always in step."

"Because she makes the step?" Pendleton laughed. "You rather like to dance, don't you, Burgoyne?"

"It isn't a question of like or dislike. It's a question of what the lady wants—and whom she wants. Devereux is a fool about her, and I think I'm getting dippy too. Nothing serious, Pendleton, nothing serious, I assure you; but she is a mighty attractive girl and we both know it. You understand."

"I understand!" Pendleton answered. "What

did I tell you the first day you saw her—at the Club, wasn't it?"

"Yes—the same day that you met Stephanie Lorraine when she drove up alone—you remember?"

Pendleton nodded—finished knotting his tie, drew on his waist-coat and coat, picked up his gloves, and he and Burgoyne went down-stairs, just as the clock was striking eight.

Immediately dinner was announced, and they went in without partners, and found who they were when they got to the table.

Pendleton was not surprised to find he had Stephanie Lorraine on his right; in fact, he would have been a trifle disappointed had she not been there. It was becoming the rule among Stephanie's few (at present) friends always to include him in their invitations, and always to put them together when it could be done without making too much of a point of it. She was looking particularly fit this evening, in a dull green gown, with a collar of emeralds about her soft white throat and a copper-gold net binding her copper-red hair.

She met him with the familiar little nod that she reserved for him alone, and looked up at him with a bewitching glance as he placed her chair.

"I am surprised to see you!" she smiled.

"Here?" he asked.

"Anywhere!" she answered.

"Is it a pleasant surprise?"

"Of course."

"Anywhere?"

"Everywhere!"

"Everywhere is rather more comprehensive than anywhere!"

"Is it?" she inflected slyly.

"Did you mean it so?" he asked.

"Perhaps."

"You're doubtful?"

"Sometimes."

"When are the sometimes?"

"It depends—on the sometimes."

"Will there ever come a time when there won't be any sometimes?" he asked, bending toward her.

She looked at him—a dreamy, thoughtful light in her eyes.

"I wonder," she said—"what do you think, *mon ami?*"

"I don't think—I *hope*," he replied.

She smiled faintly, but with entrancing sweetness.

"Thank you, Montague," she said low—"I shall not forget—at present, I don't dare remember—you understand?"

"I understand," he answered—"more's the pity. —How is Lorraine?"

"Better—he sent for me yesterday."

His eyes sought her face questioningly.

"I went—and stayed a minute," she replied. "I hope I wasn't in too great hurry to get away. It was ghastly, however—perfectly ghastly! I trust he doesn't send for me again. Don't let us talk about it," and she gave a little shudder and reached for her sherry.

Burgoyne, on her left, caught her eye as she did so and raised his glass.

"How!" he said.

"When did you join the Army!" she asked, as the glasses were replaced.

"Whenever we drink a toast to a pretty woman!" he laughed. "It's better than the navy's 'sweethearts and wives.' Sometimes it is a trifle awkward to drink to them both, you know."

He did not realize how it would sound to her until he ended—then he tried to gasp it back.

But she only smiled.

"I don't mind from you, Sheldon," she said.

"I didn't mean it!" he protested. "I was only talking."

"Just keep on talking," she replied. "I know you didn't mean it *that* way.—And it is true enough sometimes—and *sometimes* one doesn't care to drink to either," and she smiled slightly. "How lovely Marcia Emerson is, this evening," she remarked.

"From another woman that is a compliment indeed—but you can well afford to be generous, Stephanie, you can give them all cards and spades and little casino—and the ace of hearts."

"So long as I retain the Jack of Hearts, *n'est ce pas?*"

"And since you retain all the other hearts—your own included," he replied.

"Consider yourself curtsyed to most profoundly!" she laughed. "Now let us return to Miss

Emerson. Warwick Devereux seems to be making pretty fast going—can you overhaul him?"

"I?"

She nodded. "Yes, you—can you?"

"Why should *I* try to overhaul him?" he asked.

"For divers reasons—too numerous to mention—the main one is across the table."

"I see."

"I hope so—and another reason is your disposition to be generous."

"As well as to annoy," he supplemented. "You mean I will try to annoy Dev?"

"I don't think the lady will be annoyed, if you were to try the overhauling act. You know Dev—and so does she, I assume. If she does want to land him, you'll be a relief. In either event, she'll be grateful—and a grateful woman can do much for the gratefulee, especially when he is a man."

"Where do I come in?" he smiled.

"That is for you to find out," she replied.

"You think it is worth trying?"

"Don't *you* think so?"

"I don't know. I might overtake—and then not want the trick when I get it. Or I might want the trick—and then not be able to overtake."

"Certainly, you might—but you have to risk something in the game; and you're a good gambler, Sheldon—or you used to be. Have you lost your nerve?"

"I'm older!" he replied.

"Three years!" she smiled. "Moreover, I understood that the race is on."

"Not exactly—I'm just trailing—keeping the field in view."

"Rather full view, isn't it?"

"Well, I don't require a glass," he admitted.

"You're lying back until you're sure what you want, and see a chance to get it?" she said.

"That is too comprehensive," he replied. "At present I'm simply looking on—and being entertained."

"There is no possible doubt that you're being entertained!" she laughed. "How does Dev like it—is he being entertained also?"

"Sure—anything entertains him until he tires of it."

"He has not tired of Miss Emerson yet—and it has been a long time *for him.* In the normal run, he should have butter-flied away to half-a-dozen girls."

"He has never before had a Marcia Emerson to keep him on the jump," said Burgoyne. "He is used to having the girls go down before his money and birth like scuttle-pins. She is a new experience for him—and he's half tempted to become serious. If I press him too close he may become serious, and I don't want that to happen—just yet."

"Till you know if you want it to happen ever?" she laughed. "Do you fancy that Marcia Emerson doesn't know—or at least suspect?"

"I haven't thought," he admitted,—"except that she hasn't yet made up her mind about Devereux. If she concludes that she wants him she'll get him without the least difficulty, I'm sure."

"And if she concludes that she wants—someone else?"

"Meaning me?" he inquired blandly.

"Meaning you," she replied.

"If I'm too close she'll get *me* easy—hence I'm riding far aback. Good term that—far aback!"

"Perfectly good term, Sheldon—but not true in point of fact. If Miss Emerson wants you she has only to beckon, and you'll burst a girth to come up. All you nice men are alike—at the mercy of a beautiful woman when she calls."

"The vampire!" he reflected. "'A rag, a bone, and a hank of hair!'"

"Maybe"—she reflected. "At any rate, I shall not dispute it. But men like vampires—*beautiful* vampires."

"'Down to Gehenna and up to the Throne;
He travels the fastest who travels alone.'"

he quoted.

"Again there is no possible doubt of that," she replied. "The difficulty is that he rarely travels *alone*. The vampire usually gets him, and he carries her too. We women are all more or less vampires—just as you men are more or less rogues."

"I reckon you're right," he admitted. "At the best, it is simply a matter of degree—and we notice it only when the particular man and woman aren't properly mated. Then she is a vampire or he is a rogue, as the case may be."

"Now you know what to look for. A vampire who will mate your rogue!" she laughed. "Is Miss

Emerson the vampire?—that is what *you* have to determine."

"Or am I her rogue!" he laughed back. "It's a pity we don't always match up, isn't it——" Once again he bit off the words and tried to catch them back.

And once again she smiled indulgently.

"You never can know how you're going to match up until after you've tried it—and then it's too late," she answered. "That is the pity of it, Sheldon, that is the pity of it."

"The pity of what?" asked Pendleton, who had happened to catch her last words.

"The pity of not knowing," she replied, dismissing Burgoyne with a significant smile and turning to Pendleton.

"Not knowing what?" he asked.

"Nothing absolutely."

"Rather heavy talk for a dinner," he observed.

"It wasn't heavy—Sheldon and I were discussing the vampire and the rogue."

"Heavens!" he ejaculated.

"And we agreed that every woman is more or less vampire and every man more or less rogue."

"A trifle cynical, to say the least," he remarked.

"Don't *you* agree with us?"

"As a general proposition—with exceptions—I'll join the party."

"But we also agree that the exceptions are only a matter of degree."

"You mean there are no exceptions?"

"Exactly!"

"But there are infinitesimal degrees?"

"I—suppose so," she hesitated.

"Very well, I'll go along with *you*. What degree do you think I am?"

"We also were of a mind that no one knows until after marriage what degree the other is—that is the pity of it."

"In other words, marriage is an eye-opener!" he laughed. "Well we are unanimous on that point also. In fact, I'm ready to agree with you on anything, for anything, and at any time."

"Thank you, Montague—thank you, very much," she replied, with a quick glance through her long lashes. "I want you presently to agree with me—about something."

"It's done!" he replied. "What is it?"

"I cannot tell you here—wait until after dinner, when we are quite alone. I'll manage that—there will be time before Auction begins."

"If we're to be *quite* alone," he said, "can't you manage that Auction doesn't begin?"

"Don't ask the impossible!" she smiled. "Moreover, Auction is an excellent game."

"When one isn't more agreeably employed," he added.

She shot him another glance.

"You say nice things to me, Montague," she remarked.

"I do more than say them—I *mean* them."

"Nicer things even than you used to say," she mused.

"And I mean them even more—if that is possible."

"You are spoiling me with compliments."

"I want to spoil you."

"Why?" she asked, a bit startled.

"Because it pleases me to do it—and," leaning a little closer, "because you deserve to be spoiled in the proper way."

"I didn't deserve it—once," she answered.

"You're a different woman from what you were—once, Stephanie."

"People seem to think so!" she said, a trifle bitterly.

"I didn't mean *that*," he answered quietly. "I mean that there has been little enough in your life of late to spoil you, so I shall try to make it up to you. May I?"

For a moment she did not answer—bending her head lower over her plate. Then she turned and faced him—the adorable smile on her lips.

"You may spoil me, Montague,—if you think it wise," she said. "I'm a wilful creature, you know."

"I'll risk the wilfulness," he declared—"it is little enough to risk."

"Pendleton can tell us," came Cameron's voice—"if he will stop talking trash to Mrs. Lorraine long enough to answer."

"And talk trash to you instead, I presume," Pendleton remarked. "Certainly, what is it?"

"How long has Porshinger belonged to the Club?" asked Cameron.

"Longer than he ought," said Pendleton dryly.

"We know that!" the other laughed, in which the table joined. "But was it last year, or the year before—you were on the Board of Governors, weren't you?"

"Not when *he* came in," Pendleton replied. "Consequently it must have been within the last two years; since my term expired. Sorry I can't help you out."

"Why is it that every Governor fights shy of having voted for Porshinger?" Cameron asked. "If you press them, they all side-step the responsibility. Porshinger isn't such a bad fellow as a whole."

"Taken as a whole!" exclaimed Devereux. "Lord save the mark! the dose is prohibitive—very little of him is more than sufficient for me."

"What is the matter with him—except that he's a bounder and all that?" Cameron asked.—"There are many in the same class, and some of them 'belong.'"

"True enough," Devereux agreed; "but we tolerate the belongers who belong, on account of their families—at least for a time. Those of Porshinger's stamp are just plain bounders; they have nothing to go on except themselves."

"Would you rather be a bounder with Porshinger's wealth and financial position, or a bounder with only a family behind you?" Cameron inquired.

"Me for Porshinger!" Burgoyne declared. "He

has the money and may improve—the other chap is hopeless."

"He is at the next place—Woodside's, I understand," Miss Chamberlain broke in. "Suppose we ask him over and try our softening influence on him."

"Sample him before tasting," Cameron suggested.

"Shake well before taking," Devereux amended.

"We shall ask Pendleton to do the shaking—so it is thoroughly done!" Cameron laughed.

Burgoyne gave Pendleton an amused smile, which the latter returned. They were thinking of the episode on the Club-house piazza.

"You're not serious, Gladys?" cried Mrs. Burleston.

"It is for the table to say," Gladys submitted. "Vote, please—you begin, Dorothy."

"I vote for—that we have him over," said Miss Tazewell.

"So do I," said Mrs. Burleston.

"Marcia, how do you vote?" asked Gladys.

"With the others," Miss Emerson acquiesced—but she hesitated just a trifle before she said it.

"And Mrs. Lorraine?"

Stephanie did not understand the hostess' game, but she caught her significant look and acquiesced.

"I also will vote with the others," she replied.

"The gentlemen, of course, are of the same mind as the ladies so it will be unnecessary to ask them." Miss Chamberlain smiled. "Therefore it is unanimously resolved that Mr. Porshinger be invited to Criss-Cross and to make one of the party. We need

another man anyway. I don't hear any objection so the resolution stands. I shall telephone him in the morning."

"And he will be bounder enough to come!" muttered Devereux.

"Of course he will," said Gladys—"it is just because he is a bounder that we're going to ask him. You don't suppose I would venture it on you, or any other gentleman—to take you from another house where you're a guest for the week-end!"

"Cameron, what possessed you to inquire about Porshinger? You're responsible for all this fool thing!" declared Devereux.

"It was a perfectly harmless inquiry," Cameron protested, "which turned out to be loaded. I beg your pardon, Devereux, I shall never do it again."

"Remember I shall expect you men to be civil to him," Miss Chamberlain cautioned.

"Do you *actually* mean to ask him, Gladys?" said Burgoyne.

"I never was more serious in my life. Moreover it is the will of the table."

Burgoyne held up his hands.

"Oh Lord! Oh Lord!" he exclaimed.

"It isn't all bad," Cameron remarked. "If we treat him half decent maybe sometime we can all borrow an extra wad at the Tuscarora."

"Touching that matter," laughed Devereux, "I have known such things to happen."

"But not touching Porshinger," Cameron ob-

served. "The man who touches him will be a fencer indeed."

"He'll be a burglar!" Devereux retorted. "Why are *you* so quiet?" turning to Pendleton. "Why don't you say something?—join in, join in!"

"It's not up to me to say anything," Pendleton replied, as he sunk his fork into the asparagus salad.

"It's your funeral as much as anyone's!" Devereux exclaimed.

"Not at all—it is Miss Chamberlain's. She will have to bear the responsibility and the burden—and be nice to him in future. We are obligated to nothing except to be civil to him while we're at Criss-Cross. It is not worrying me in the least—moreover, I'm not in need of money."

"Now you have it, Devereux!" said Cameron. "Want any more?"

"Not at present, thank you!" Devereux laughed. "Meanwhile we have until to-morrow before the bounder arrives. I'm going to enjoy the time while it lasts—it is short enough as it is."

"How are you going to enjoy it?" asked Mrs. Burleston.

"Making love to you."

"Why should Mr. Porshinger's coming interfere with you making love to Helen?" Gladys inquired.

"'Oh, the fascinating widow!'" sang Devereux.

"Do be sensible, Dev," Mrs. Burleston exclaimed.

"Ask of him something possible!" Gladys laughed.

"Dear Lady, you speak with a cruel tongue——"

"But with a true tongue," she interjected.

"Perchance—yes! Verily I say unto you that unless you wear red hosiery in the autumn the truth isn't in you and you shall surely be damned."

"There is not the least doubt of *your* being damned," remarked Cameron.

"You mistake the sex—I don't wear *hosiery.* I wear socks."

"I'm not so sure!" Cameron retorted.

"That could be taken as a reflection on me, but you naturally referred to the ladies. 'Twas a most ungallant speech, monsieur, a most ungallant speech! Remember it not against him, mademoiselles—he knows not what he does."

"What a clown Dev can be when he tries!" smiled Pendleton. "His facial expressions make funny what otherwise would be rotten."

"And it is so absurd in him, who is such a wonder in business," Stephanie added. "The man has a double nature, surely—and I can't say that I care for this side. It doesn't fit!"

"On the contrary, it seems to me it fits admirably. He is able to throw off his cares and forget them—and to make a boy of himself. That may be the reason he is so shrewd—he comes at business fresh every morning. I think it was a pretense at first, but it has become second nature now."

"I like a manly man, not a combination of a man and a harlequin," said Stephanie. "A man like Mr.

Chamberlain or—you, Montague," with a tantalizing smile from under her lowered lids.

"Don't tempt me!" he warned.—"Don't tempt me!"

"It is perfectly safe to tempt you—*here*."

"It may not be on the piazza."

"The temptation *passes* when we leave this room," she enjoined.

"I am not so sure," he threatened.

The hostess arose.

"Does it pass?" Stephanie asked.

He only smiled, and drew out her chair.

"Does it pass?" she repeated as she faced him.

His only answer was another smile.

"Very well, sir; I'll not go on the piazza with you until you acquiesce—and neither will I arrange that we are quite alone, as I had intended."

"You win!" he laughed. "The temptation passes—for to-night."

Half an hour later, the coffee finished, Mrs. Lorraine arose and went into the house. Presently a servant very quietly summoned Pendleton to the telephone. Stephanie was on the landing when he entered the hall, and she met him at the foot of the stairs.

"I'm the telephone," she remarked.

"I had hoped so," he smiled. "Where shall we go?"

"On the side piazza, where the lights are not burning."

He held back the portieres, and they went through

the library and out into the star-light night, where the silver crescent of the moon was cutting its way toward the western horizon. All was still save for the faint hum of voices at the front and occasional laughter.

"It's a perfect night!" she breathed. "How much better the country is for one than the dirt and noise and bustle of the big town. The peace and calm—the *dolce far niente* of it all—is very, very restful."

"It's the place for women who don't have to work —and the men who can afford not to," he said. "Everyone is gravitating toward the country—the pure air, the pure water—the simple life that is not quite so simple as it once was."

"But it's simpler than town life—heaps simpler," as she led the way to a remote corner, where two chairs stood apart.

She took one.—He drew the other close over, and sitting on the arm reached down and took her hand.

"You said the temptation passed," she admonished —while suffering it to remain.

"This isn't temptation—it's admiration, adoration——"

"Flirtation!" she laughed.

"Whatever it is, it *isn't* flirtation," he said. "You know that, don't you, Stephanie?"

She gave him a fleeting look.

"Yes, Montague, I know that," she answered softly—and quietly withdrew her hand. "Now sit down and let me tell you what it is I want you to agree

to—we haven't much time, you know. Devereux will be on our trail if we're absent too long."

He whirled the chair around and sat down—then calmly leaned forward and, in a masterful matter-of-fact way, took possession of both her hands.

"Will that make you more amenable?" she laughed softly, yielding them to him.

"I'll agree to anything you wish, *now*," he responded.

"But it's not exactly right, Montague," she protested.

"I know it isn't," he admitted; "when we want, we do a lot that isn't right. What is it you have to tell me?"

"It's about Porshinger—" she hesitated.

"You knew Gladys was going to ask him?" he said.

She shook her head. "No, I didn't—she did it on the spur of the moment, I'm sure, though she may have had this matter we are coming to in mind. You're puzzled—and I don't wonder. Tell me, Montague, did you ever have any trouble with Porshinger?"

"Not especially!" he said, trying to throw surprise into his voice. Who had told her?

"Not especially!" she repeated. "What does that mean?"

"Perhaps you would better tell me what *you* mean," he said.

"Yes, I think I would," she replied, "and it's this: I lunched with Marcia Emerson yesterday at

Partridge's—then I took her home in my car. On the way she told me that a few nights prior she was up at the Club until late, and while sitting alone on the piazza she had overheard Porshinger and Murchison—who were seated around the corner from her and evidently thought they had the place to themselves—discussing you. It was only a few words, but they were significant. Murchison asked if there was anything new in the *Lorraine* affair.

"'Not much,' said Porshinger. 'The matter is progressing; Pendleton is not invulnerable—I've found a way to reach him, and he soon will be having troubles of his own.'

"Murchison advised him to leave well enough alone; to which Porshinger replied that that might be Murchison's way but it wasn't his way—that you had started the fight, and you would think 'merry hell was loose' before he was done with you."

"Is that all Miss Emerson heard?" asked Pendleton.

"Y—e—s, that is all."

"Are you sure, dear?"

"There *was* something else—it's of no consequence, however. I don't recall it now!" she fluttered.

"Wouldn't you better tell me all?" he said quietly.

"Isn't what I have told you sufficient?" she parried.

"Tell me the rest, Stephanie," he urged.

"He called you a 'snob.'"

He smiled. "You're keeping something back."

"You *have* made him an enemy?" she evaded.

"I'm afraid I've also made him an enemy of some one else—and that she is hiding it from me. Tell me, dear, weren't *you* included in the threat?"

"I'm a poor hand at evasion," she sighed.—"Yes, I was included. He said—'and the Lorraine woman too.'"

"I thought as much!" he exclaimed—"the miserable, skulking coward!"

"But I don't understand!—What is it all about—what does it mean?"

"It means that Burgoyne and I had some words with Porshinger and his friend Murchison the night of your return. It was up at the Club and late and no one saw it. They have been so quiet about it since that I thought it had been dropped. I didn't realize what a vindictive brute we had stirred up. Well, we will try to be prepared for the great man!" he laughed.

"This fight," she began——

"I didn't say there was a fight," he interposed.

"No, you didn't say it—but there *was* a fight, and it was about me—something that he or Murchison said in your hearing, and which you resented.—Wasn't it, Montague?"

"You're very knowing!" he smiled.

"I don't ask you *what* it was—but *if* it was?" she persisted.

"Something of that sort," he admitted—"though the—ostensible dispute was over the cut of Por-

shinger's coat, as I recall it. Your name was not mentioned."

"But *they* understood?"

"It seems so."

"Tell me about it, Montague," she begged—"the fight and all."

"It doesn't tell well," he objected.

"Tell it anyway!"

"It was just a scrap between us, nothing more."

"But I want to hear it—you did it for me, so why shouldn't you tell me?"

He looked down into the soft eyes upturned to him—and yielded.

"It was this way," he said. . . . "It was foolish, I suppose," he ended, "but one doesn't always stop to consider under some provocation. I never for an instant thought it would involve *you* in his spite. I didn't credit him with being so small and mean."

"And now I want you to promise me that you will take every precaution to guard yourself against him," she said.

"Myself!" he exclaimed. "Yes, myself for the purpose of protecting you."

"And for the purpose of protecting yourself also," she broke in. "I am persuaded that Porshinger means mischief."

"What persuaded you?" he smiled.

"The man himself."

"You don't know him?"

"I met him this morning."

"At Criss-Cross—he was here?"

"No—I met him on the Churchville road—while I was taking my early morning walk."

"Had he the effrontery to address you?"

"Very respectfully and very courteously—I did not resent it in the least.—You see," as he looked at her doubtfully, "I myself was trying something, Montague."

"Trying to put salt on the tiger's tail?" he smiled.

"After a fashion. I was reconnoitering—trying to find out his weak points."

"Did you succeed?"

"A little—he is like all men—fond of a pretty woman and—her figure."

"Which you might very readily have inferred," Pendleton remarked.

"No," said she. "Some men with his characteristics are totally indifferent to women. I found out also that he is sensitive about his personal appearance—he wants to look and act a gentleman—and that he will do much to be received by our set."

"Do you consider such weakness very vulnerable?" he asked, amused.

"Most undoubtedly—he will forego much to advance his social position."

"And *you* think of helping him on?"

"Not that exactly," she reflected. "I think to use it to our advantage—though how I've not the least idea as yet."

"I think you don't appreciate what manner of

man Porshinger is, my dear," said he soothingly. "He is as cold as ice and as hard as armor-plate."

"I inferred as much—and such men are usually easy to influence if they have a hobby. Porshinger's hobby—concealed though it be—is the social whirl. Let him but think that he's whirling and anything is possible."

"You're not thinking of—flirting with him?" he asked, puzzled.

"No—just trying to make him like me well enough to forego his revenge. If he foregoes me, he likely will forego you also—as a matter of policy."

"My dear child!" smiled Pendleton. "I'm not concerned about his revenge—not in the least. He can't hurt me, and I don't see how he can hurt you—*if you let him alone.* The danger, with his kind, is in being nice to them and in having your motives misunderstood and misinterpreted. Since you have met him, you can be politely nice to him but—tell me about this meeting on the road," he said suddenly. "Did it seem to be premeditated on his part?"

"I don't know—but I think not. He overtook me about a mile from the Overton stile—you know the place. He merely raised his hat and spoke casually—as one does in the country—and was passing; then held back; and I gave him leave, by my manner, to accompany me—which he did as far as the Criss-Cross gates."

"Were you going or returning?"

"Going—we returned by the path through the Overton property."

"Why do you smile?" he asked.

"At something that happened—not with him, you foolish boy, not with him—with the Overton bull."

"The what?" Pendleton exclaimed.

"The Overton bull—he assisted me over the fence."

"You don't mean it?" he cried.

"If you had seen me going over you would think that I meant it!" she laughed. "However, I'm quite satisfied that you didn't—there was altogether too generous a display of silk hosiery and lace."

"You prefer that Porshinger should see.—What was the bounder doing?—why didn't he protect you?" he demanded.

"He couldn't—he tried to protect me, but the bull avoided him and made for me."

"He is a bull of sense," said Pendleton. "I compliment him on his discrimination."

"But you can't say so much for me?" she smiled.

"You need some one to look after you, dear—some one on whom you can depend——"

"A matador?" she suggested.

"Very effective so far as the bull is concerned—but not the sort you seem to require."

"You mean something that will keep off undesirable acquaintances."

"Precisely."

"What would you suggest—measles or smallpox?"

"I would suggest a husband."

She shrugged her bare shoulders.

"You forget that I already have a husband—a Mr. Lorraine," she replied.

"That is precisely why I suggest the need for another."

"One can't have two husbands, Montague."

"Not at the same time—and be lawful," he answered.

"Do you mean that I should try another—Amherst?" she asked.

He held up his hands.

"God forbid!" he replied. "I mean 'according to God's own ordinances,' and so forth."

"Who would have *me?*" she said bitterly.

He leaned a bit forward and looked at her intently.

"I'm a tainted thing—amusing, good to look at, to chat with, to while away the time with, like the high class *demi-monde;* but for anything more—no! no!"

"You don't think that," he replied.—"You know——"

"I know what the world says of a married woman who does as I have done. It may tolerate her but a man never marries her—or if he does the world punishes him by loss of caste."

He leaned closer, bending down until her hair brushed his face and its perfume rose about him like a cloud.

"I am ready to risk it, dear one," he whispered. "I am ready to marry you the moment you are free."

"You are ready to marry me?" she breathed. "No! no! Montague, I was not playing for that, I was not——"

"Stephanie, dearest, don't you love me?" he asked.

She looked at him steadily an instant—then over her face broke the entrancing smile, and she put up her arm and drew his face close to hers.

"Yes, sweetheart," she whispered—and kissed him on the lips.

But when he would have gathered her into his embrace she stayed him.

"No, dearest," she said, "I will not let you be an Amherst, even in a little—nor would you yourself. I am not going to provoke a fresh scandal that will involve you and make of our—love a reproach. Suppose some one saw me in your arms—what would be the natural inference—with my recent past?"

"No one would see," he pleaded.

"We must not risk it—for your sake, we must not." She put out her hand and slipped it into his. "You may hold me as close as you like in fancy—you can't hold me *too* close—but help me to be strong, dear one, help me to be strong!"

"You are right," he reflected.—"Just another kiss, and then——"

She held up her face—and their lips met.

As they did so, the lights suddenly flared up in the room directly in the rear and through an open window fell full upon them.

He straightened up instantly.

"No one saw!" he said, glancing around toward the house.

"One can never tell," she answered, with a nervous

little laugh. "Some one *may* have seen." She got up hastily. "Let us go in, we have been out here long enough—and Devereux will be on our trail."

He took her hand and drew it through his arm, and they passed down the piazza and into the house.

. . . . . .

And some one did see!

Porshinger and Woodside were coming up the walk just as the light flashed out.

"Look there!" the latter exclaimed.

Porshinger nodded.

"A new one on the string," Woodside continued. "Oh, these fascinating women!—You may be able to use that kiss to—advantage, my friend. Two on the string are not too many, unless *you* would be the only one.—Hey?"

But Porshinger did not answer—and Woodside, with a sharp glance at him, said no more. He did not understand.

As for Porshinger, after the episode of the morning, he did not know whether to be pleased or sorry. He walked on a few steps—hesitated—stopped.

"On the whole, I think we'll not drop in," he remarked—"at least, not this evening. It might not be a propitious time; moreover, Miss Chamberlain may consider me as an intruder. You have no right, Woodside, you know, to take me there, even in a happen-in, without her express permission."

Whereat Woodside stared—and then laughed.

"Precisely my idea!" he remarked—and faced about. Assuredly he did not understand.

XIII

THE UNPOPULAR GUEST

"My offer to include Porshinger in the party rather met with opposition!" Gladys laughed, as she and Stephanie sat alone together in the former's boudoir that night. She balanced her slipper on one silken toe and surveyed it critically. "I thought Sheldon Burgoyne would choke and that Warwick Devereux would have a fit. As for Montague Pendleton, one never can tell from *his* manner whether he is sitting on a red hot stove, a piece of ice—or an easy chair. Though my private opinion is that he liked it the least of any of them."

"No, you never can tell by Montague's manner," Stephanie agreed. "It is always severely indifferent outwardly, and no one ever gets behind the scenes—with him."

"No one—but Stephanie Lorraine!" Gladys smiled, "and she won't tell. In fact, you two are much alike in temperament—the calmly placid sort on the surface, and the devil knows how turbulent underneath."

"You flatter me indeed," Stephanie replied, drawing one gleaming coppery braid slowly through her fingers. "I consider it a very great compliment to be likened to Montague, even in a little thing."

The other looked at her speculatively a bit, drum-

ming the while with slow fingers on the dressing table in front of her. Stephanie, with a dreamy, absent air, continued drawing the braid back and forth against her cheek.

"It's a pity!" reflected Gladys thoughtfully.

Stephanie continued to toy with her braid and did not seem to hear.

"It's a pity," Gladys repeated.—"A grievous pity that you didn't marry Montague Pendleton—instead of Harry Lorraine."

"It's more than a pity—it's a calamity," replied Stephanie imperturbably.

"Why don't you marry him now?" Gladys demanded.

"Simply because it's contrary to the law of the land for a woman to have two husbands at the same time. Harry Lorraine happens still to be alive."

"Why don't you get a divorce?"

"I haven't any cause—and he hasn't any pluck."

"You can go to Reno," Gladys suggested.

"What will Reno accomplish—if he opposes it! Moreover, I don't want a Reno divorce. I should never feel that I *was* divorced."

Gladys smiled and was silent.

"It is better than Amherst and six months in Europe, you are thinking," Stephanie added. "And you're quite right; that was hell—perfect hell."

Gladys picked up her hand-glass and studied her face in an impersonal way—as though it were the face of a stranger.

"And you think," she said presently, "it would be a heaven with Pendleton?"

"By comparison, yes—a perfect heaven," was the answer.

"You would be willing to risk it?"

Stephanie ceased playing with her braid, and leaning forward took a cigarette from the case on the table.

"Yes, I should be willing to risk it," she replied, —"if he were to ask me—and Lorraine were out of the way."

"I think," said Gladys, laying aside the mirror and drawing her slender feet up under her, "I think he will ask you, if Lorraine gets out of the way in a reasonable time. But you mustn't expect him to wait forever—a man is a fickle beast at best, you know."

"Beast is an appropriate term for most men!" Stephanie exclaimed.—"But it doesn't apply to Montague."

"Possibly it doesn't—you never can tell, however, until you've lived with a man and tried him."

"Montague is a *dear!*" Stephanie declared.

"Of course he is a dear, a perfect dear," her friend agreed—"and you are not taking much of a chance, but there is a chance."

"*He* would be taking an infinitely greater chance," said Stephanie.

"He would be taking no chance whatever."

"With my past?"

"Your past is what warrants you—you have been tried in the fire and all the dross fused out of you. I would rather trust you *now* than—myself."

"You think that all the bad is out?"

"I do, indeed!"

"I wish I were so sure of it," Stephanie mused.

Gladys laughed softly.

"You *are* sure of it, dear. Montague Pendleton himself couldn't drag you out of the straight and narrow—and that even though you were to love him madly." She got up and going over perched herself on the other's chair-arm. "Forget the past—your friends have forgotten it. Be thankful that it *is* the past—and that once more the sun is shining. You have those who are devoted to you, and you have—Montague."

Stephanie drew the other down and kissed her.

"*Maybe* I have him!" she smiled. "You said that I have him for a reasonable time—that man is a fickle beast at best."

"The reasonable time varies with the man!" Gladys smiled back. "With Montague Pendleton it is likely to be forever. He loved you, I think, before your marriage—he loves you still. Isn't that an assurance of the future?—Now let us get back to the Porshinger matter. I didn't telephone—I wanted to discuss the invitation with you. I know that Mrs. Woodside is absent and he's simply down with Woodside, so we could ask him well enough. And, on the whole, I think it would not be a bad scheme. You're afraid of him for Montague, as well as for yourself. He is a climber, with enormous wealth and power—and he's coming over the wall, so why not assist him? He will

be grateful and it may cause him to relent. He will know that if he injures Montague he will injure his chances for Society. Moreover, the sooner we start to draw his fangs the better it will be for you two."

"I don't think Montague will approve," said Stephanie. "I told him Marcia Emerson's story, and he laughed at my fears—though admitting there *had been* a difficulty and that I had to do with it. Then I also told him of the walk with Porshinger and of Overton's bull; and while he didn't say much, I could see that he didn't like it."

"All of which goes to prove his affection for you —if you doubt it," Gladys remarked.

Stephanie smiled an answer but did not voice it— and Gladys put her arm around her friend's neck and was silent also for a moment.

Presently she said:

"Was Montague actually averse to Porshinger's being asked to Criss-Cross?"

"In a mild sort of way, yes—but nothing vehement, I assure you."

"It isn't Montague's way to be vehement," Gladys observed. "At any rate, I think we'll try the experiment. I'll ask him over to-morrow in time for tea, explaining that we need another man—and so boost him up the wall a bit. We can size up the situation—his amenability to kind treatment principally —and if it's not promising we need go no further with him. But I'm inclined to the notion that being nice to him will be exceedingly effective. He im-

pressed you as well-mannered and fairly agreeable, didn't he?"

Stephanie nodded. "So far as I could judge superficially he is no different from the men we've known always. I found him very pleasant and courteous. Whether it was natural with him or only company manners I didn't try to find out."

"Naturally not.—Well, we'll turn the wild animal loose among the tame ones and see what happens. *We* can at least enjoy the fun.—*You* don't object, my dear?"

"Not in the least!" Stephanie laughed.

. . . . . .

The following morning Woodside came out on his piazza, a queer look on his face.

"You're wanted on the telephone," said he to Porshinger, who was sitting looking out over the valley.

"Mr. Porshinger, this is Miss Chamberlain," said a particularly sweet voice, when he had answered.

"Yes, Miss Chamberlain, how do you do?" said he.

"I want to know if you won't come over to Criss-Cross this afternoon and join us at tea, and stay for dinner and the night? Mr. Woodside has been exceedingly nice and says he will excuse you—now you be equally nice and *come*, won't you?"

"Why certainly, certainly—I shall be delighted," Porshinger responded; "but I can't stay the night. I'm going back to town on the midnight train. I must be there early in the morning."

"That's *very* good of you—we shall be glad to

have you for the evening—at five o'clock then—good bye, Mr. Porshinger!"

Porshinger hung up the receiver and went slowly out to Woodside, who was smoking like a chimney.

The latter glanced at him with a shrewd smile.

"Getting on, aren't you?" he remarked.

"I don't know whether I'm getting on or getting under," Porshinger replied.

"You're getting both, I should say. It won't be long until they have you under hack with the rest of the men."

"You think so?"

"I'm perfectly sure of it—you'll be so satisfied to be *in* that you'll eat out of their hands. You may be the devil in business and the stock market—also adamant—but you'll be an innocent little lamb and a wax baby in the women's game. They won't pick your pockets—oh no! you'll hand out everything you have and hustle for more to give them—and do it cheerfully."

"You seem to be wise!" Porshinger retorted.

"I am wiser than you, at any rate. You've been too absorbed in acquiring money to give any time to the petticoats—except those of a certain kind, and you don't learn anything from *them* but bargain and sale. You have a new experience coming, old man, a new experience! These people don't care a damn for your money——"

"Then why am I asked?" Porshinger interrupted.

"Because you're wanted—for some other reason."

"Hum!" said Porshinger. "Maybe I'm wanted to play the clown."

"It is entirely possible!" laughed Woodside: "though a likelier guess would be that they want to inspect you—to size you up, and to try you out, and to play Auction with you. However, you've got two of them at an advantage—that kiss on the piazza last night ought to be good for something."

Porshinger blew a cloud of smoke high in the air and watched it whirl away on the morning breeze.

"It ought to make the fair widow—Mrs. Lorraine, I mean; I'm always thinking of her as a widow —more—obliging," his host commented.

"You're a bit of a beast, Woodside!" Porshinger observed.

"Oh, I don't know!" was the response. "When it comes to that there isn't much choice between us, Charlie, old boy. You know perfectly well it's her face and figure that's the attraction."

"Well, do you blame me?"

"Hell, no!—I rather envy you the chance."

"The chance of what?" asked Porshinger.

"The chance to *improve* on acquaintance. You have accepted, I presume?"

Porshinger nodded. "If you will excuse me."

"Sure—delighted to facilitate your campaign."

There was just a suspicion of mockery in the words—and Porshinger detected it.

"So you think it is a campaign when one tries to know new people?" he inquired.

"I wouldn't put it just that way!" was the laughing reply.

"What?"

"I shouldn't call the Chamberlains and their house-party *new* people."

"Don't be absurd; you know what I meant. There are circles within circles in Society, and——"

"We are in one of the outer circles and aiming to climb into the inner ones, I understand. Miss Chamberlain's invitation is a big boost for you—if you make good. If you don't make good, you are in for a nasty tumble. Query:—Are you invited that you may tumble, or are you invited that you may climb—in plain words, are they making sport of you or are they not?"

"I scarcely think that they will make sport of me!" Porshinger laughed. "I'm not accustomed to being used that way. Moreover, they are too well bred. Our intimates might do it, Woodside, but not these people. That is why I'm for climbing the fence—understand?"

"Pooh!" Woodside scoffed. "They are no different from other people, except that they think they're more exclusive."

"And think it so successfully that every one who is outside wants inside—yourself among them, my friend, yourself among them."

"I don't give a damn for them!" Woodside declared.

"Maybe you don't—but Mrs. Woodside does—and you do too, if you'd be honest. Everyone does,

Josh, everyone does. It's a humanly universal failing. Let some set themselves up as particularly exclusive and the rest are wild to get in with them."

"Hell!" muttered Woodside.

The two men smoked a while in silence—then Woodside spoke.

"It's mighty queer," he said, "and altogether lucky for you."

Porshinger raised his eyes and waited inquiringly.

"Altogether lucky!" the other repeated. "You back out of a 'happen in' yesterday, and receive a 'come-in' to-day. Can you explain it?"

"I can't explain it—unless it is the result of my walk with Mrs. Lorraine, yesterday morning. However, I'm frank to say that I didn't play a particularly heroic part in the bull episode; so unless I made an impression otherwise I reckon that isn't it."

"Has Miss Chamberlain been especially friendly before this?" Woodside asked.

"Not at all."

"How about the others at Criss-Cross?"

Porshinger shook his head.

"Might it be old Chamberlain?"

"Possibly—but I think not. He never allows business to dictate his friends, I understand."

"Good thing when you can afford it!—Well, there must be *some* reason for asking you."

"A particularly sage observation. Button! button! who has the button?"

"Butt in! butt in! you're the butt in!" amended Woodside

"Get out!" laughed Porshinger, flinging a magazine at him. "I haven't an idea what is the reason, but I'm perfectly sure it won't be declared this trip, and possibly never. Don't look a gift horse in the mouth, Josh."

"Better be sure it is a gift horse," was the answer. "However, you for it, my friend—it's your funeral, not mine."

"I'm going to it a pretty live corpse."

"You'll need to be very much alive, I take it. I should be afraid of that gang. They're so damn dignified and unobtrusive in their self-assurance. You can't tell what they are playing for nor how. As I said before, you're a wonder for business but you're in the novice class in this woman's game. You have my best wishes, my friend—also my prayers. You don't care for the prayers? Oh, very well."

At the same hour on the piazza of Criss-Cross, Gladys Chamberlain confided to her guests that Porshinger was coming to them at five o'clock.

"Any objections?" she inquired, looking at Devereux.

"Plenty of them!" he answered; "but I'll save them for an exclusively masculine audience."

"How about you, Steuart?" she asked.

"Same here!" replied Cameron.

She turned to Burgoyne. "And you?"

"Ditto!" said he.

"Really I am overcome by such gratifying unanimity!" she laughed. "You too, Montague, I suppose?"

"Not at all," Pendleton answered. "I'm in the hands of my hostess."

"Which is exceedingly polite but means nothing," Cameron explained.

"It was meant to mean nothing," Devereux interrupted.

"Was it, Montague?" Gladys asked.

"It was meant to mean whatever you wish," said Pendleton. "Whatever is agreeable to you is my desire. If you wish Porshinger what have we to say or to do—except to be agreeable?"

"Oh, certainly—Miss Chamberlain knows that we'll be agreeable!" Devereux exclaimed—"also that we do object to Porshinger. What is the use of spoiling a particularly congenial crowd by having a bounder run in on us?—However—orders are orders. We'll turn out the guard to receive him and do him full reverence for your dear sake, Gladys." He tossed his cigarette away and arose, "Miss Emerson, I have the honor to ask you to go for a stroll—wilt come, sweetheart, wilt come?"

"Coming, dearest, coming!" laughed Marcia. "Tarry only until I get a sunshade."

"At the foot of the steps, I will await you. Haste, little one, haste, I pray."

"You will be back for luncheon, I presume?" Gladys called after them, as they went down the walk.

"Not if I can persuade the beauteous lady to elope with me," replied Devereux. "Otherwise, we shall be back—and hungry."

"What is the reason for this unusual tack of

Gladys?" Burgoyne asked Pendleton in an undertone.

"You mean as to Porshinger?"

"Of course."

"Friendship and interest, I presume," Pendleton answered.

"Bosh!" said Burgoyne. "What is it—do you know?"

"I told you: friendship and interest—in Mrs. Lorraine?—and incidentally in your humble servant."

"Good enough! but just where does it come in, please—what does it consist in?"

"In drawing his fangs—Porshinger's fangs."

Burgoyne looked puzzled.

"You remember our little fracas with Porshinger and Murchison up at the Club some time ago?" said Pendleton.

"Sure—that is what makes his coming here embarrassing—though they both have utterly ignored it since."

"Only outwardly. Porshinger has threatened vengeance on Stephanie and me, it seems. The women heard of it—Gladys and Stephanie, that is—and have a scheme to propitiate him, the first course of which is this invitation to Criss-Cross. Subsequent courses will depend on how this one goes down with all concerned. It's nonsense, certainly, but as he *can* injure Stephanie, if he sets himself to do it, I don't feel justified in opposing it."

"The infernal scoundrel!" Burgoyne exclaimed.

"Do you actually think he contemplates taking his revenge on a woman?"

"To be quite candid, I don't know. However, judging from his business methods, he is mean enough for anything."

"Can he reach *you?*"

"If he should try, yes—he has sufficient power, with his enormous wealth and its ramifications, to reach almost any one in some way or by some means."

"He is a good hater, I've always understood," said Burgoyne.

"I'm not alarmed," Pendleton answered.

"Doesn't he include me in his revenge?"

"In the story Stephanie told me your name was not mentioned. Moreover, you'll remember that you trimmed Murchison, while I did for Porshinger."

"I don't like it—I mean this invitation. The women are lending themselves to—placate the rotten beast."

"Nor I," Pendleton returned; "but just because Stephanie is involved, I dare not protest. Gladys says Porshinger is going to get in anyway—it is only a matter of a short time, and that the end justifies the means. I made light to Stephanie of their apprehension, but nevertheless it is serious. It was a grievous blunder to begin that fight—and Porshinger knows he can even up with us best, and hurt us most, by injuring Stephanie. If he can knife me also, so much the better."

"I don't like it!" Burgoyne reiterated.

"On the other hand," Pendleton continued,

"Stephanie says, and Gladys supports her in it, that if she is nice to him, in an ordinary acquaintance way, he may get a change of heart."

"I doubt it."

"So do I—but she has the right to her opinion and to act on it."

"More than likely she will only injure herself by being nice to the cur," said Burgoyne. "Are you sure she isn't doing this on *your* account, Pendleton?"

"No, I'm not sure," he answered. "I've tried to disabuse her mind of the notion that he can hurt me, but I don't know how successful I've been."

"Hum!" Burgoyne thought. "You never can tell what fool ideas a woman has—when she cares for a man."

. . . . . .

At five o'clock Porshinger drove up to Criss-Cross in the Woodsides' car. A servant took his bag, and another showed him up to the west piazza, where tea was being served.

"I'm so glad to see you, Mr. Porshinger!" exclaimed Gladys, with a welcoming smile that fell on fruitful soil. "You know every one, I believe."

Porshinger did not *know* everyone, but everyone greeted him as though he did. The women smiled and nodded, the men "how-are-you-Porshingered" him in the careless fashion of their kind, and went on with their talk and high-balls.

"Rye or Scotch—or will you have some tea?"

asked Miss Chamberlain, pointing to a vacant chair beside her.

"I'll have some rye, if I may," Porshinger answered.

"Help yourself—they're on the side-table there."

He helped himself and returned to her. She met him with just the word needed to start the conversation and the moment was relieved of embarrassment. Then she picked out a topic mutually negative and sufficiently interesting, and they tossed it lightly back and forth.

Presently Cameron glanced over and broke in.

"Possibly Mr. Porshinger can tell us," he said—"Do you know whether Betheson has sailed yet for China to take up those railroad concessions he has succeeded in financing?"

"I'm not sure," Porshinger answered. "I think he was to sail this week—I understand that he arranged for the money in New York and started at once."

"The Tuscarora didn't get aboard then?"

"No—we were offered the underwriting but we didn't fancy going so far away. It looked like a good thing, however."

"So Betheson thought!" Devereux smiled.

"He will likely make a pot of money out of it," Burgoyne chimed in.

"If he doesn't spend two pots in the attempt," added Pendleton.

"Which is altogether possible—and has been known to happen!" Porshinger laughed.

And so, the ice being broken, the talk became general.

The men, for courtesy's sake, tried to treat Porshinger as one of them—and succeeded in making him feel reasonably easy. They could not quite make him forget the fact that he was *not* one of them, but that was something beyond their power. Politeness can do much, but it cannot reach far enough to make one feel an insider, who knows that he is an outsider. However, they did their best, which was very considerable; and Porshinger realized it—which was to his credit.

After a while the women went off to dress, and presently the men threw away their cigars and betook themselves to their rooms.

Porshinger having bathed and shaved, got leisurely into his evening clothes, and then drew a chair close beside the window.

Woodside's place was visible a mile away—perched on the side of a hill among the huge forest trees. It looked calm and quiet and peaceful, and he wondered if he would not be better there than where he was: among strangers—an uncongenial interloper to them, a conscious intruder to himself. They had been very courteous, very kind, very considerate. Miss Chamberlain had been particularly hospitable. Mrs. Lorraine—he smiled in contemplation—Mrs. Lorraine was entrancing—Mrs. Lorraine would bear cultivating—Mrs. Lorraine would—he shook himself and sat up. Mrs. Lorraine was occupying too much of his thoughts. His was a campaign for social recognition

first—and if Pendleton and Burgoyne were well disposed and inclined to forget the past, he might be willing also to forget. . . . Mrs. Lorraine looked particularly well this afternoon!—never had he realized what a superb figure was hers!—how exquisitely proportioned!—how winning her face behind its cold loveliness!—what a charming foot and ankle! She—he got up sharply. What was the matter with him? Was he actually getting interested in this coming divorcée—did she appeal only to his senses? Then, like a flash, came the recollection of the scene on the piazza the night before—and he laughed a little mockingly. *He* would be but one of them. The fruit had been already tasted by Amherst and Pendleton—and the Lord knows how many others. At present it was Pendleton—next month it might be he—or another! . . . She *was* marvellously good to look at. Never had he seen one who was her equal, who even approached her. . . . Well, he would try his hand—try to be one of them—and then to be the only one, if she still held his fancy. Of course it would have to be done discreetly—so that none would know but those he had displaced. He smiled! It might be that she was honest now—since the Amherst affair—but it was most unlikely, most unlikely. His own eyes had seen what would convict her of being dishonest. Mrs. Lorraine still—her husband helpless in a hospital—and her lover with her *here!*—No, it was not in the range of the possible. She was bad all through—with the badness that allures men because it is garbed in the robe of inherent respectability

and high social position. . . . He lit a cigar, and as he smoked he considered the question—its bearing on himself socially and his prospects. He saw that it meant he must overlook the fracas with Pendleton—must lay aside his resentment and turn the other cheek toward Mrs. Lorraine if he were to have any hope of success. Then he smiled again. It would be but another sort of revenge on Pendleton; to take her from him—a more refined revenge than to injure Pendleton in his bank account or to have some thug beat him up. Here was a new view of the matter; made so by the incident he had overseen the previous evening. . . . Yes, on the whole it was the best way—decidedly the best way. He would get Mrs. Lorraine, and his revenge on Pendleton at the same time. . . . Of course she *might* not be obtainable. She might hold to Pendleton—it was an old attachment, he had heard, and she might be faithful to him. But he could offer inducements that were likely to be particularly appealing, and of the sort that usually won. If she were not to be lured from Pendleton, then he could take up the other matter. There was no haste; he was a good waiter as well as a good hater—and a generous lover. With Mrs. Lorraine he would be more, much more than generous. . . . Well, he would see how the adventure promised. . . .

In the gathering shadows of the evening, he saw Mrs. Lorraine and Pendleton come out on the open piazza below him. They stood leaning on the stone

balustrade, and though he could hear the murmur of their voices the words were not distinguishable.

She laughed softly, infectiously, intimately; and Pendleton's mellow tones joined in. . . . . .

Porshinger's eyes glowed. . . . . Yes, she was good indeed to look at. Good indeed! The call of the woman came up to him—and he yielded. So far as he was concerned, the game was on. Pendleton was an obstacle, of course—but it would be a positive pleasure to overcome him. He was rather accustomed to obstacles, indeed they were just enough of a deterrent to add zest to the conquest.

He came down-stairs a moment before dinner was announced, to find that he was to take his hostess in.

"I am greatly honored," he said, as he gave her his arm.

"Not at all, Mr. Porshinger; you quite deserve it," she replied.

"Why should I deserve it?" he asked.

"Didn't you save my guest from the Overton bull?"

"I most assuredly did *not*. She saved herself by beating him to the fence and over it."

"You helped. You delayed the animal long enough for her to get a start—and moreover you tried to attract him to yourself, you know, so the end justifies the reward, I think."

"A large reward for a trifling service," he remarked.

"The trifling and the large—depend on the re-

THEY STOOD LEANING ON THE STONE BALUSTRADE

spective points of view!" she smiled as he placed her chair.

When he turned to take his own, he saw that Mrs. Lorraine was upon his right.

"Your reward is out of all proportion even from your point of view," he said, with a significant glance at Stephanie.

"Do you object?" Gladys asked.

"Does a thirsty man refuse drink?"

"Not if he is thirsty—and not always if he *isn't*."

"I trust I shall always be thirsty—and deserving."

"It is up to yourself, Mr. Porshinger," she said.

And he understood. He was being given his chance to make good—to make friends—to make himself popular. If he failed, he would have only himself to blame. His look wandered around the table. Pendleton was just across between Mrs. Burleston and Miss Tazewell. Cameron was Mrs. Lorraine's partner.

Presently she turned and greeted him with a smile.

"I hope you suffered no ill effects from the unfortunate experience of yesterday," he said.

"None whatever!" she laughed. "Not even a bruise. I might fancy I flew over the fence, if I didn't know otherwise. However, I avoided the Overton path this morning."

"You walked this morning?" he asked.

"I walk every morning, when I'm in the country."

"I wish I had known—though doubtless you had company."

"The more the merrier," she returned, with her spoon poised critically over the grape fruit.

"I shouldn't take the rest to be early risers," he reflected, running his eyes around the table. "Come, tell me—didn't you go alone?"

"Which would be tantamount to saying that the others are not early risers."

"Would they object?"

"No—I don't imagine they would.—Did you walk this morning?"

"I wasn't an early riser, either!" he smiled. "You see, I didn't know you had the habit."

He saw that she had avoided his question—doubtless Pendleton had been with her.

As a matter of fact, she had walked alone.

"We shall have to try it some other Sunday morning," he suggested.

"Is your walking confined to Sunday mornings?" she asked.

"My visiting at country houses is confined to week-ends—more's the pity."

"Don't you ever take a vacation—a long vacation, that is?"

"I've never found time."

"You've been abroad?" she asked.

"On business—never for pleasure—and I come home the minute the business is finished, sometimes before."

"Don't you expect ever to take a vacation?" she inquired.

"Certainly—when I get the opportunity."

"You mean when you're dead."

"Possibly!" he laughed.

"You ought to have enough. You could stop this instant and be the wealthiest in the State—one of the very wealthiest in the Nation."

"What are a few millions!" he minimized.

"A few! Do you call thirty *few?*"

"Who said I am worth thirty millions?" he asked.

There was just a trace of pride in his voice—and she detected it.

"Aren't you?" she smiled.

"To be candid, I don't know. I can't tell from day to day—values fluctuate, you know. I may be a million poorer one day and a million richer the next—and not have changed a single investment."

"The bounder!" she thought. "Though it is really my fault—I led him on."

For an instant Pendleton caught her eye; and she knew that he had heard, though he was seemingly occupied with Mrs. Burleston's chatter.

As for Porshinger, having found that Mrs. Lorraine was interested in his money, he thought to appeal to her by an intimate little talk; he was doing this and that and the other, he was considering thus and so; he had done mighty things (which was true enough), and he promised to do more. He confided it all to her in an indefinite, impersonal way—and flattered himself that he was making a deep impression.

And he was—though not in quite the way he assumed.

Presently he turned back to Miss Chamberlain, and Stephanie looked at Cameron and smiled.

"Did you enjoy it?" he asked, amused.

"Some of it," she answered.

"You see now what Gladys has done?"

"She has but anticipated the inevitable."

"And made *us* in a way responsible."

"No one is responsible for the inevitable, Stuart—except the man himself and the power of his money. The combination is irresistible."

"In these days, yes," he replied. "As a people, we have become utterly commercialized—we have put everything on the basis of dollars, our social life along with the rest. It is pitiable but it is true. We have no traditions left—or rather we have *only* traditions left. In some of the towns in the South, they still honor their traditions by living up to them—dollars won't buy a way in, you have to *belong*. But with us—" he ended with a shrug. "Look on your other hand, if you doubt it."

"What are we going to do about it?" she asked smilingly—"accept the inevitable, or be exclusive all by our lonesome?"

"We wouldn't be alone if we would pull together," he commented.

"United we stand, divided we fall. It's the same everywhere," she replied. "We're not united because the old spirit of class has departed. It's every one for himself now—and no quarter given nor expected."

"Well, I can stand it if you women can," he remarked.

"Don't you think that it is woman who is commercializing society, so to speak—who is accepting money, if you please, to let the outsiders in. She wants a rich husband—if he happens to be her social equal, well and good, but it's the money that moves her."

"That may be true so far as it goes—but it doesn't go far enough," he replied. "We men also are to blame. Daughters marry where their parents let them. It may be indifference in our sex and premeditation in the women, but both are about equally culpable. There is small choice between us. We have got far away from our old moorings of respectability and conservatism."

"And we're drifting toward liberality and opportunity for everyone—which is the better, think you?"

"*Yonder* is an instance of it," he said, meaning Porshinger.

"Why is it you men are so hostile?" she asked.

"Because he doesn't *belong*—as you know quite well. You can't make me believe for an instant that *you* want him in—or Gladys either. There is something behind this prank of our hostess. She is using Porshinger to subserve some purpose. What is it?"

"You must ask Gladys—I'm not a mind reader!" Stephanie laughed.

"Possibly I should make more progress if I asked Porshinger," he retorted.

"You doubtless would make more of a sensation," she returned.

"Who would make more of a sensation, Mrs. Lorraine?" Devereux asked across the table.

"You!" said Stephanie.

"A perfectly self-evident fact," agreed Devereux. "I can always be relied upon to do the unexpected—it's the way of all original men."

"And idiots!" Cameron added, in a perfectly audible aside.

"What kind and courteous things my friends *think* of me!" Devereux remarked.

"You should be very grateful!" observed Gladys.

"Grateful? I'm positively prostrated with gratitude, my dear girl. So much so that I'm afraid I have not strength to play Auction later. Moreover, Mr. Porshinger may not play on Sundays."

"Don't worry about me!" Porshinger laughed.

"I'm not worrying about you a bit—I'm worrying about our hostess. She is *so* thoughtless at times. An awful failing, Mr. Porshinger, an awful failing, particularly in one's hostess.—Yes—I knew you would agree with me."

"My dear man," Porshinger began, "I——"

"Don't mind him, Mr. Porshinger," Gladys interrupted. "He is a bit wild in his talk, at times—nothing dangerous, however. He just can't help it."

They all left the table together and went outside—where the coffee was served. Porshinger found himself, by intention, beside Mrs. Lorraine.

"I think I owe the pleasure of dining at Criss-Cross to you," he remarked presently.

"Did Miss Chamberlain tell you so?" she inquired.

"Not expressly—but by inference."

"Which is not at all," she smiled. "The hostess is always responsible for what guests she asks. You were convenient, we needed another man, and you consented to come, which was exceedingly kind of you. If I am at variance with what you have been told, you can take your choice."

"I was rather glad to be obligated to you—along with Miss Chamberlain," he replied. "It's a new sensation in me to be obligated to anyone—it is always the other way."

"You have many men coming to seek favors?" she said, turning the conversation to him and away from herself.

"Many men!" he laughed—"hundreds of them indeed. It's one of the penalties of wealth, I suppose."

"And one of the privileges also, it seems to me," she replied.

"That depends on the applicants—the larger number are without the least claim of merit; simply barnacles that one has to hew away. I leave it to my secretary—he does it for me and gets quit of them."

"It must be a very pleasant feeling to help the deserving and needy," she reflected.

"The modern business man hasn't much time either for the deserving or the needy, Mrs. Lorraine," he answered. "He's not an eleemosynary institution

—he's a hustler. If he isn't a hustler, he's not for long—in the way the game is played now-a-days."

"I suppose not," she said slowly—"and it seems a pity."

"Why?" he asked. "Why does it seem a pity? It's the natural way—to kill off the drones and incompetents."

"That doesn't make it any the less cruel—and not every one who is killed off is a drone or an incompetent."

"Then he is not fitted—which is the same thing in the end."

"No, it is not the same thing—there is a wide difference. A man may be a poor financier but an admirable musician—or a poor musician and an adroit financier—and all that ails him is that he was started wrong."

They were passing the angle where she and Pendleton had sat the prior evening, and he looked at her thoughtfully. He could see it all again, as clearly as if it were occurring now:—her upturned face and enchanting smile, Pendleton bending over her with the air of entire possession. Surely this could not be the same woman who walked beside him—so calm, so dignified, so thoroughly sure of herself. It was incredible! And yet his eyes had seen. . . . And was Pendleton the only one?—were there others also?—might he be one, too? . . . He did not quite feel so sure of himself, nor of her, as he did before dinner, up in his room alone with his intentions. With some women, the sort whom he knew by experience, his question would have been sharp and to the point.

But Stephanie Lorraine was—different. He could not bring himself to it—his courage was weak——

Suddenly he realized he was staring at her—and that she was looking at him questioningly.

"I—beg your pardon," he stammered.

"For what?"

"For my bad manners—I forgot myself."

"You mean that you were staring at me?"

"Yes—too long—at one time, I fear."

"I don't feel any ill effects!" she smiled. "A woman gets used to being stared at, especially in these days of tight skirts—and scanty other things."

"*You* would be stared at if you wore crinoline and hoops," he answered, with an attempt to be gallant.

"I undoubtedly should—as a perfect sight!" she laughed.

"And a mask also," he added.

"I should then be mysterious:—'Who is it?' they would ask."

"You would have individuality and beauty, whatever you wore," he averred.

"You did better that time," she remarked.

"I am exceedingly glad. It encourages me to hope that in the end I may not be such a—duffer."

She raised her eyebrows and gave just the slightest shrug of her bare shoulders.

"Whatever I should call you, Mr. Porshinger, I shouldn't call you a duffer."

"I scarcely know whether that is complimentary or not," he said.

"What do you think it is?"

"I don't think—I don't know what to think. At the best, I take it to be—negative."

"Which is safe—and exceedingly sane. You will never err by being too optimistic, Mr. Porshinger."

"So one learns in business!" he laughed.

She suppressed a smile. It was always business with him. Apparently he could not get away from it even at a dinner party or for an evening. The men called him a bounder—and not without reason. But she was going to be nice to him, if he would let her, and see what would come of it, whether she could manage him without his being the wiser. She had learned a lot about him from himself, yesterday morning and again this evening; and while it was not of the pleasantest, yet she would play her part without any excessive repugnance. Some women could have liked him for his money—a great many women, indeed—and tried to get him into the family either directly or indirectly, but none of it for hers. . . . Of course, there was the chance that she was playing with fire, that Porshinger, being familiar with the past, would try to presume on it, and—she must be prepared for that contingency, if she were unable to control the situation. He was a masterful sort of man, but masterful men are easy to manage if taken the right way and handled with tact and finesse.

Which is true enough with the men of Mrs. Lorraine's own class—but she did not know the Porshinger kind.

She lost his words for a moment. When she caught them again he was ending:

"So you see, as I said, it is the way of the business man."

"Yes—of course," she answered vaguely—"it's a good way, as the world goes I dare say."

"None better—none so good!" he declared. "That is why we are at the top of the heap to-day. We are a hundred years ahead of our fathers, so to speak."

"And our sons will be a hundred years ahead of us?" she asked.

"Likely enough, if they don't go asleep on our achievements."

They were passing again the angle of the piazza.

"Didn't I see you here last night with Pendleton?" he asked abruptly.

"I really don't know," she replied. "Perhaps, I was—I don't remember."

"I'm sure of it," said he—"the light flared out suddenly from this window and showered you with its brightness."

He looked at her with a reminiscent smile—and she understood. He had seen Pendleton kiss her—and he meant to kiss her himself. Well, at least, she knew now how to handle him.

"It was not I," she replied carelessly, as she turned into the house, "I was not on this end of the piazza last evening."

He smiled again, tolerantly.

"Perhaps I *was* mistaken," he answered.

XIV

NOBLESSE OBLIGE

Porshinger played Auction until he had just time to change his clothes and catch the train back to town. The game at his table had been rather stupid—a very colorless lot of hands, no large penalties—and had ended with the score about even.

Pendleton had no opportunity for a quiet word with Stephanie—possibly by her intention—and she went off upstairs with a nod and a backward glance from the landing. Her glance, however, could say much when she was so minded.

"Come in, girls, and gossip a bit," said Gladys, as the four of them were passing her door. . . . "What did you think of Porshinger, Helen?"

"As an Auction player he is pretty fair," Mrs. Burleston replied. "I didn't form any opinion of him otherwise. It wasn't necessary."

"There is a certain set to his jaw that I don't care for," Miss Tazewell remarked. "He has a trick of dropping it, and then gathering it up and pushing his upper lip back with it. He makes me nervous."

"Did it interfere with your play?" laughed Gladys.

"It disconcerted me. I couldn't keep my eyes off him when he did it—which was about all the time."

"Maybe that is the reason he did it!" Stephanie smiled. "I never observed the peculiarity."

"Perhaps he reserves it for the card table and other weighty affairs of life," Mrs. Burleston suggested.

"Didn't *you* notice it?" demanded Dorothy.

"Not particularly—though since you mention it I do recall something of the sort."

"You must have been blind, Helen."

"I wasn't looking in Mr. Porshinger's face, my dear," retorted Mrs. Burleston sweetly.

At which Miss Tazewell laughed.

"You could infer that I was," she replied good-naturedly; "but I hope you won't!"

"I thought Porshinger wasn't so bad," Gladys remarked. "He handled himself very well at dinner, and was most polite,"—with a glance at Stephanie.

"He seemed to talk enough," said Mrs. Burleston. "Didn't I overhear him discussing business with you, Stephanie?"

"He didn't discuss much else," Mrs. Lorraine replied.

"I wonder if he *was* an oil well shooter originally?" remarked Dorothy. "I've heard so."

"I've heard so, too," Mrs. Burleston replied. "It's interesting because he has survived. They all are killed in the course of a few years—about five is the outside limit for them, I'm told."

"I reckon he got his own well before the limit expired," Dorothy commented; "and he also got about everyone's else wells in course of time—including the gas wells. Then he became a financier, and proceeded to get suckers."

"Whom did you hear say that?" laughed Gladys.

"Warwick Devereux, of course—whom else?"

"Why is it the men have such a contempt for Porshinger?" Mrs. Burleston reflected. "They all seem to despise him."

"A man's judgment of a man is rarely at fault," observed Miss Tazewell, from behind a cloud of cigarette smoke.

"Except when the man is a rival in business or love," Gladys remarked. "Then he is apt to be a bit biased."

"Which would include about everyone," was the answer.

"I've never heard of Porshinger being in love."

"You've heard of him being in *business*," Dorothy smiled.

"Something of it!" Gladys replied.

"Do you like him?"

"That is what I'm trying to find out—by asking him here."

"Have you succeeded in finding out?"

"Isn't that rather a leading question?" Miss Chamberlain asked.

"Why did you want to find out?" Miss Tazewell persisted.

"I wanted to anticipate the crowd," Gladys explained. "In a year everyone will be trying—and most of them will be finding him very agreeable."

"Mainly because you started it. You entertained him—the mob will follow like sheep."

"You rate me quite too high, my dear," said Gladys.

"Do I? We shall see."

"Unless you all join in with me," Gladys added.

"I prefer to wish you a false prophet—and that Porshinger won't be taken up. He hasn't a single thing about him that is attractive—except his money."

"And the fact that he is *not* married—and wants to get in," adjected Gladys. "Why don't one of you three marry him?"

"Why not all of us marry him?" said Dorothy over her shoulder, as she went out.

"I haven't a doubt he would be entirely willing—if you can arrange it together, and be peaceable!" laughed Gladys.

"You might submit it to him!" Dorothy laughed back.

. . . . . .

"Well, what did *you* make of him?" Gladys asked, when the others had gone.

"Not much—but enough to know that he is dangerous," replied Stephanie, holding out one silken ankle and inspecting it critically.

"It seems to me you've made out very considerable. Is he too wild to be permitted with our tame animals?"

"He is pretty savage, Gladys, pretty savage. I don't know that I care to see him except in a crowd. To be perfectly candid, I'm afraid of him."

"Afraid of him!" her hostess marvelled. "Mercy upon us, what has happened? What did he do to-night in the few minutes you were alone—kiss you?"

Stephanie shook her head. "No—he didn't kiss me."

"Tried?"

"No—he didn't try—he didn't even so much as touch my gown, to my knowledge."

"Was it his talk?"

"Yes—and no. It was his manner, which was strictly proper and yet most indicative of what he was capable. I tell you, I am afraid of him!"

"You mean that his talk was suggestive?" asked Gladys.

"No—not in that way—yet it was suggestive of what he could do if he had the opportunity." She laughed a little consciously. "You see, last evening on the side piazza—when Montague and I were alone—he did something a trifle beyond the conventional. Just as he did it, some one turned on the light in the billiard room directly behind—and Porshinger saw us."

"Where was *he?*"

"I don't know."

"How do you know he saw you?"

"He told me."

"What! baldly told you?" Gladys exclaimed.

"Not that he had seen—*it*, but that he had seen *us*. He told the balance with his look and his smile—and what he didn't say."

"What ailed Montague that he got unconventional—or rather what ailed you that you let him?"

"The evening, I reckon, did for us both—and the

miserable lights did the rest. I'm inclined to hold you responsible, my dear, for our being seen."

"But not for your being—unconventional. I reckon Montague is alone responsible for that, while you, with your fascinating beauty, are responsible for nothing at all but the impulse.—Are you going to quit him—Porshinger, I mean?"

"That is the question—and I don't know the answer. If I quit him, he will be revenged on Montague; if I don't quit him, I shall have to fight him for my reputation—or so much of it as is left."

"Is he so bad as all that?" Gladys exclaimed.

"He is. His one vulnerable point is his overweening desire to get into society. That fact may make him controllable. I'm between his Satanic Majesty and the deep water. *What to do*, Gladys, *what to do?*"

"Do nothing," counselled her friend. "Be amiably polite, and refuse to see anything that you don't want to see or to infer anything that you don't want to infer."

"Suppose he doesn't leave it to inference?"

Gladys raised her eyebrows. "In that event, you tell Montague—and leave the rest to him. I rather fancy he will beat the life out of Porshinger; and I rather fancy he will enjoy doing it—very much enjoy it, indeed."

"The difficulty is, you can't beat the life out of a man—even figuratively speaking—without creating a sensation, getting yourself talked about and, like enough, into the law's clutches."

"If *you* would be left out of the sensation and the talk, I reckon Montague wouldn't mind in the least," Gladys remarked.

"No, I fancy he wouldn't—but I should mightily. He isn't my husband."

"Not yet, unfortunately—you'll have to endure Harry Lorraine a bit longer. Pray that the longer may be very short.—Oh! I'm not wishing him a corpse, Stephanie—before his time; but I would not prolong the time."

Stephanie smiled a little wanly. "Unfortunately you are not the ultimate one. He must go his course to the end, and so must I—alone—and yet together, unless he reconsiders. That, however, does not particularly interest me now—or rather this matter of Porshinger interests me much more. I'm going to have trouble with that man, Gladys, I'm sure of it."

"Aren't you anticipating, my dear?" asked Miss Chamberlain.

"Certainly, I'm anticipating what I'm convinced is in future for me. If it shouldn't happen, I'm fortunate to have escaped."

"And if it never threatens, you're unfortunate in having anticipated."

"I'm unfortunate anyway, so a little more or less won't matter," Stephanie answered.

"You unfortunate? A woman with your face and figure and presence—with true friends, both male and female—and Montague Pendleton. Oh, no! my dear, *oh, no!*—Oh, you may shrug those pretty shoulders. I know what you mean—but that is past and

passing. You've had an experience, a wonderful experience, and you're the better for it, I think—and as you yourself know. It hasn't hurt you; it's only made you appreciate who are your friends and proven the extent of their regard."

"Was it just to my friends to have their regard for me put to such a severe test?"

"Why not? It didn't hurt them. Either they did or they didn't at the pinch—when you returned and looked for countenance. Some were timid about granting it, but granted it; others granted it straightway."

"Like you and Montague and Burgoyne!" Stephanie exclaimed.

"The others were only a bit shy, my dear. They all believed in you, you may be certain of that. Most of them didn't feel sure how their overtures would be received—and *you* didn't give them much help. You were as hard as flint and as cold as an iceberg."

"Because I thought everyone would pass me by. My experience at the Club that first afternoon didn't augur well for me—except with Montague and Burgoyne. Then *you* were—just the same, and the skies brightened."

"And now you're clouding them again by this foolish fear of Porshinger," said Gladys. "Let alone! Don't you know the old maxim: 'Never trouble trouble till trouble troubles you.'"

"My dear Gladys, don't you think that I have troubled trouble sufficiently to want a brief intermission?"

"Of course you have!" sympathized Gladys.

"And to be entitled to it?"

"I should say so."

"Then why should I borrow trouble unless I had a presentiment of it impending? However, it hasn't cast me down, and it's not going to cast me down. Neither shall I refer to it to anyone, not even to Montague—until I must—and I hope that I shall never must."

She kissed Gladys good-night and walked to the door.

"Maybe my dinner didn't quite agree with me!" she laughed—"though I'm not usually troubled that way."

"Wouldn't you better consider telling Montague?" Gladys urged.

"No—well, I'll think over it to-night. Sleep is a great clarifier."

"If you can sleep there isn't much the matter with your digestion, nor with your Porshinger worry," Gladys called after her as the door closed.

Stephanie did not take her walk the next morning. It was raining heavily, and when the men drove off she waved a farewell to Pendleton, who had glanced up at her window, and went back to bed.

Pendleton caught the flash of a white arm and raised his hat; but when the others followed his look there were only the closed curtains to greet them.

"I wish you wouldn't do that, Monte," said Devereux.

"What?" Pendleton asked.

"Take to yourself what isn't meant for you—that farewell was for me."

"Go back, Dev, and get it—or another," recommended Burgoyne.

"I'll do it——"

"You'll go to the station first," interposed Cameron. "We have no mind to miss our train."

"Oh, very well!" said Devereux, sinking back. "As you will, Malvolio—I'll return anon, or next week."

"If you're asked!" smiled Pendleton.

"A timely provision, monsieur—we may none of us be asked—particularly as we weren't much pleased with having Porshinger rung in on us."

"Oh, damn Porshinger!" said Cameron quietly. "What got into Gladys, do you suppose?"

"We will delegate you to investigate, Dev," remarked Burgoyne. "You want an excuse for returning."

"I don't need any excuse, thank you, dear," Devereux replied.

"Well, tackle her without one and feel yourself laid out in a cold bath."

"I likely would!" Devereux laughed. Then he became serious. "What the devil *was* her idea in having Porshinger? Gladys Chamberlain is the last one to be inoculated with the money madness that seems to have afflicted the rest of the social world."

"Yes," said Cameron, "if she had been any of a score of women, I should say that she was fascinated by his wealth, but I'll not believe it of Gladys."

"She has no need," observed Burgoyne. "Old Chamberlain's got enough, the Lord knows!"

"What do you think, Pendleton?" demanded Devereux.

"I don't think."

"Merely negative, or do you mean you don't want to think?"

"A little of both, thank you," said Pendleton.

"I believe you have been confided in by the lady!" Devereux exclaimed.

"Then if that be the case——"

"Sure thing—you daren't babble!" admitted Devereux. "However, she has a reason, and I'm damn curious to know what it is—though I bet it is a woman's reason, which is no reason at all."

But Pendleton did not enlighten him by so much as a look, and the next moment the car drew up at the station.

That afternoon, when he was about to leave his office, Pendleton had a telephone call from the Hospital. Lorraine wanted to see him, the resident physician said, and would he come around before dinner; something seemed to be on Lorraine's mind, to be worrying and exciting him. He was much better and it would do him no harm to see Pendleton a short while.

"I'll come at once," said Pendleton.

Lorraine was sitting up in a pillowed chair when he entered.

"How are you, Pendleton?" he said somewhat weakly, and holding out his hand. "I hope I'm not too much of a bother to you."

"Not a bit," replied Montague. "I'm glad to see you so far on the mend. I feared that you were pretty much all in, from the newspaper accounts of the accident."

"I thought so myself—or rather I didn't think until later. However, I'm not so much battered up as they had thought, and I'll be out in a week; a trifle bruised and cut and sore, possibly, but nothing serious. My head is all right—the injury was only temporary, thank the Lord!"

"That's a great comfort to know," Pendleton answered heartily. "If one's head is right, the rest will soon come around."

"Yes—yes," said Lorraine. "I'll be out of this in a week." He glanced impatiently toward the nurse, who was standing in the window. "I'll be out in a week," he repeated.—"Miss Sayles, will you excuse Mr. Pendleton and me a moment—I'll call you when we're through.—It will take only a very short time."

"I'll be in the corridor," the nurse smiled—with a glance at Pendleton, which he understood as a warning not to stay too long.

Lorraine waited until Miss Sayles had gone out and closed the door quietly behind her, then he said:—

"I haven't much time, nor have you any to waste, so I'll not beat around the bush, Pendleton—we'll cut the preliminaries and come down to the facts——"

He paused, and Pendleton wondered what was coming. Was he about to make a scene because of anything he had heard in regard to Stephanie?

"It's this way," Lorraine went on:—"I don't

know whether you know it or not, but I fancy you do.—I've made an infernal damn fool of myself in the way I've treated Stephanie. I see it all now. I've been lying here and thinking, and thinking, with nothing else to do, and it's perfectly plain, perfectly plain. It was all my fault originally. I had her—and I lost her—and I've no one but myself to blame in the first instance. If I'd been careful of her—had appreciated her—she would have had no occasion to make a mistake. Amherst wouldn't have had a chance to work his smooth way with her. Damn Amherst! I could choke the life out of him—*damn him! damn him!*"

"Don't excite yourself, Lorraine," Pendleton cautioned. "Why not leave this matter until you are better and able to be about?"

"No—I must say it now. It will do me good to say it. I'll try not to get excited. I'm not excited now—see?" He held up an unsteady hand. "At least, not much. We'll let Amherst rest, for the moment. I'll handle him when I'm quite fit—if I can ever find him. Do you think I'll find him, Pendleton?"

"Certainly you will find him," Montague answered soothingly. "And now you wait and tell me all this some other time—to-morrow."

"No—now—to-day," persisted the sick man. "Listen! You were Stephanie's best friend before the wedding. You've always been a friend—until she went away. I want you to be her friend still, Pendleton. She needs a friend who is trustworthy—who is dependable—who won't be misunderstood by the

world. She won't have *me*—I tried—I offered to take her back—to let the past be buried—to forget and forgive—to be all to her that I should have been. But she declines. I went to her house and offered—plead with her—besought her—without avail. She visited me the other day, at my request—but she hasn't softened toward me. I don't know that she will ever soften. I'm afraid she won't. Yet I mean to try, Pendleton—I mean to try; and though it takes a year, or ten years, I shan't give up. I shall never give up, Pendleton, I shall never give up!—Will you help me—will you be her friend?—Stand by her at this crisis—when she won't have her husband, yet needs him more than she ever needed him? Won't you try to take my place toward her—you understand, old man; guard her—protect her—sympathize with her? You were fond of her once—you still are fond of her. She may let *you*—she wouldn't let me.—Save her, Pendleton—save her from herself, if need be.—You will, won't you, you will?" he ended, his voice sinking to a mere whisper.

"My dear Lorraine, I'll do anything in my power for Stephanie," said Pendleton. "But I think that you are unduly apprehensive. She is not without friends—she has plenty of friends, and they are staunch friends. Gladys Chamberlain, Helen Burleston, Dorothy Tazewell, Marcia Emerson, Burgoyne, Devereux, Cameron—they all are for her. We have just come from spending the week-end at the Chamberlains. In a few months the Amherst episode will be forgotten, even by the Queen P's. Don't worry,

old man, it will only retard your recovery. As for you and Stephanie, you two must work that out alone. But you can depend on us being for Stephanie *always*." He reached down and took Lorraine's hand. "You know that, don't you? We all will stand by her to the final call."

"I thought *you* would, Montague, and it's mighty good to know of Gladys and the rest. A woman can do much at such times."

"And you mustn't think of it until you're out of this place," Pendleton urged. "Your business is to get well; we'll look after Stephanie, you may depend on it."

He moved toward the door, and Miss Sayles appeared at the same moment.

"Here is the nurse to send me away!" he smiled. "Good-bye—and we'll look for you at the Club in a week."

"Good-bye, Pendleton, old man," said Lorraine faintly.

He sank back among the pillows and closed his eyes. He could see it, though the other had tried hard to hide it. Pendleton had no interest whatever in him—he had forfeited all claims for sympathy by his vacillating course. All the men had lost patience with him. They might feel for him as a victim of bodily pain, and try to make it easy for him because thereof, but he knew—he *knew*. He had been a fool—he was still a fool maybe in trying to make it up with Stephanie—yet it was the only decent thing to do—

the only thing he wanted to do. He made a gesture of despair—and the nurse came over and spoke to him.

But he did not hear, or did not answer—and after a moment she went back and sat down. She understood in part. Everyone in town was aware of the Lorraines' troubles—and *she* knew, also, of Stephanie's visit to her husband and how it had terminated.

As for Pendleton, he went to the Club dissatisfied with himself and with what he had done. He had no patience with Lorraine's conduct and Lorraine knew it—at least he had never been at any pains to conceal it—and now he was constrained, by regard for an injured man, to appear to help him, when *he* hoped for nothing so much as Stephanie's divorce. She was committed to his care—to him, who was the last man Lorraine should have selected to trust. . . . And maybe Lorraine also knew it—and chose him because of that very fact, tied his hands by trusting him, with full confidence that he not only would not violate the trust, but that he would be vigilant to see that no one else trespassed. He had not credited Lorraine with so much foresight and knowledge of specific human nature. It might be he erred in the credit, but nevertheless it bound *him.—Noblesse oblige.*

XV

IN THE CONSERVATORY

"How does Porshinger seem to be doing?" asked Miss Chamberlain, as five weeks or so later she and Stephanie were having luncheon together in town.

"Very well, indeed, so far as I can judge," the latter answered.

"I don't know anyone who is more competent to judge," Gladys smiled. "He now is your shadow. Any indication of any attempt on Montague?"

"None.—Indeed, he has been rather complimentary of late to Montague, in a mild sort of way."

"Beware the Greeks bearing gifts."

"I am being aware.—Montague doesn't like it at all; in fact, we've quarrelled."

"Quarrelled with Montague!" cried Gladys. "I can't believe it!"

"We've quarrelled nevertheless, and all because of Porshinger. Montague insisted that I was encouraging the 'bounder,'—and one thing led to another until I flashed out. Montague lost patience and grew angry—and we fought."

"Like two children!" the other laughed. "What in the world ever possessed you to quarrel with Montague Pendleton, the best friend surely a woman ever had?"

"I think it was the devil!" confessed Stephanie.

"The devil at the very least," agreed her friend.

"Have you given him no chance since to make it up?"

"I've seen him only once—on the street. I think he has been away."

"How like a woman!" Gladys remarked. "To quarrel with the one man who is devoted to her, absolutely devoted to her, and who hasn't a selfish thought where she is concerned! Stephanie, I feel like shaking you!"

"I feel like shaking myself," Stephanie replied. "By the way, didn't *you* ever quarrel with your best man friend? I think I can recollect several at different times—for instance——"

"Of course you can recollect—but don't!" Gladys laughed. "However, none of the interested parties was a Montague Pendleton. Good heavens! my dear, do you realize what he has been to you—what he *is* to you?"

"I think that is just what made me quarrel—the perversity of the woman. I'll make it up, however, and he *will* let me make it up, and we will be better friends for this little disagreement. The nice thing about Montague is his broad-mindedness."

"*One* of the nice things," amended Gladys. "He has got several more—more, indeed, than any man I know. I never could understand, Stephanie, why you——" she broke off and jabbed her fork into her salad.

"Why I didn't marry him instead of Henry Lorraine, you were about to say," Stephanie finished. "Neither do I—it is only another exhibition of our sex's perverseness. And I've been paying the penalty

for it ever since—and it is a long account." She shrugged her shoulders expressively. "You're going to the Croyden's ball tonight, I suppose."

"I am invited. I never miss anything at the Croyden's, if I can help it. They do things *well*. You're going, of course."

"I don't know—I feel rather listless today."

"Get over it," said Gladys briskly. "Your mother is away, so come and stay the night with me and we'll go together."

With the result that at ten o'clock the Chamberlain car deposited them at the entrance of the Croyden country-house—a huge place, with great, wide piazzas on all four sides, but so arranged that they minimized the extent of the house and made it seem only of average size.

In the dressing rooms they came upon Helen Burleston, Dorothy Tazewell and Arabella Rutledge. They all went down-stairs together, and greeted their host and hostess. Presently they were found by Devereux, Burgoyne and Cameron, and the eight of them strolled out on the west piazza.

Burgoyne was with Gladys and Stephanie, and Gladys enquired:

"Where is Miss Emerson, Sheldon; you and Devereux haven't both lost her, have you?"

"We haven't found her yet, I fancy!" Burgoyne laughed,—"at least, I haven't."

"Then it is safe to infer that she hasn't arrived. You're a good hunter, Sheldon."

"Thank you, my lady—I appreciate the compli-

ment from one who has so often been the quarry yet never has been caught. How many scalps dangle at your belt, I wonder?"

"Not yours, at all events!" Gladys laughed.

"No—not mine," Burgoyne returned sadly. "I have been prudent even though it has been at the expense of my happiness."

"How cleverly you have concealed it!" Gladys retorted.

"Until now, alas!"

"Perhaps we may strike a bargain," she reflected.

"A bargain!" he protested. "How sordid!"

"How does Miss Emerson view the question—the general question, I mean?"

"I haven't asked her!"

"You haven't asked her *yet*," she corrected.

"But I think—I think she would at least not style it a 'bargain,'" he replied.

She tapped him with her fan.

"Try it, Sheldon—try it, my boy!" she said. "'Faint heart never yet,' you know."

"Brave heart has failed in some instances," he replied. "Witness your girdle and its appendages."

"Precisely—but it's because they were brave that they hang there. They at least had a chance of winning, and they took the chance."

"And lost!" he ended.

They had entered the ballroom; and Porshinger, who was standing in a corner at the other side, sighted them and bore down in pursuit.

Miss Chamberlain saw him—as did plenty of

others—and she indicated to Burgoyne that he should dance with Stephanie. She herself stopped beside Mrs. Burleston. Burgoyne understood—and putting his arm around Stephanie's waist he swung her away.

Porshinger saw the play—and smiled—and Burgoyne detected the smile and knew its cause.

"That fellow Porshinger," he remarked, "is becoming entirely too persistent."

"Do you think so?" Stephanie laughed.

"I think so—most decidedly. What does Pendleton mean by permitting it?"

"What has Mr. Pendleton to say about it?" she inquired sweetly.

"What have I to say about it, either?" he replied. "Just this, Stephanie: We're your friends—we've been your friends from the cradle, so to speak, and I, for one, am not going to let that miserable bounder compromise you without making a strenuous protest. It's beginning to be talked about in the Clubs and drawing-rooms. His attentions to you are causing comment. You don't know it, of course, but it has become decidedly marked in the last couple of weeks. At least half the people in this room saw you enter, saw Porshinger start across—and they stopped talking and watched you. Maybe you didn't notice it, but Gladys and I did, and——"

"I noticed it," Stephanie answered, "and it is absurd—this talk. Mr. Porshinger has never been anything but most courteous."

"Of course he hasn't. All *your* friends know that, but——"

"I have a bad reputation back of me," she interrupted. "Well, I can't see how I shall ever manage to keep out of its shadow. However, I promise to be more circumspect. To be quite frank with you, Sheldon, I positively dislike Porshinger. I'm doing this with a purpose."

"I know," he said; "but you can't afford it—it's too compromising. You can't control Porshinger. He is a cad—and you don't understand cads. They are not governed by the same instincts as the men of your class. Your scheme would work with them but will *not* work with Porshinger. He will misinterpret and *presume*."

"I think I can control him," she answered. "He has manifested no disposition to presume."

"Oh, no!—the disposition and the presumption will be synchronous in their manifestation, if I know anything of cads—and Porshinger's kind in particular. I wish Pendleton were here—where has he been the last four weeks?"

"I haven't the slightest idea."

He looked down at her thoughtfully.

"Well," he said, "I wish he would come back and get on the job. He is shirking his duty."

"And that duty is?" she asked sweetly.

"To look after you—now don't flare up and explode! You know that every woman needs a man to look after her—and Pendleton is the particular man for this particular woman."

"Don't be silly, Sheldon!" Stephanie laughed.

"That's better—more natural to you. Gee! what a dancer you are! There is more ravishing rhythm in your swing than any one's I know. It's simply perfect."

"I might say the same of yours."

"Don't. I'm intoxicated enough as it is."

"Just imagine I'm Miss Emerson!" she smiled.

"If you'll imagine I'm Montague Pendleton."

She did not answer—and he surmised the situation.

"You two have quarrelled," he said.

The faintest shrug of the lovely shoulders answered him.

"Now *don't* do anything rash—before you make it up," he cautioned. "I'm a little surprised at Pendleton letting you quarrel with him. I thought he was too superior a being for that; but you never can tell when——" He smiled at her significantly. "There may be method in his plan, but I—no, assuredly, you never can tell!"

"No, you never can tell anything for sure," she replied enigmatically.

The music stopped. They were just beside Miss Chamberlain and Cameron, and the four strolled out of the crush to the punch bowl on the nearest piazza.

"May I have the next dance, Mrs. Lorraine?" said Porshinger's voice behind them.

Cameron, who was close, touched her arm.

"It is promised to Mr. Cameron!" Stephanie smiled.

"How about the next?" Porshinger asked.

She felt Burgoyne's fingers close lightly around her own.

"It is taken also—Mr. Burgoyne gets it!" she smiled again.

"Which one may I have before the cotillon?" Porshinger persisted pleasantly, refusing to be rebuffed.

"You may have the—fifth," she replied.

"You mean the fifth from now or from the beginning?"

"The fifth from the beginning," she answered, as Cameron bore her back to the ballroom.

"I didn't know if you wanted to dance," began Cameron, "but I——"

"It was very good of you, Steuart, very good indeed," she replied. "I would much rather dance with my friends than with——"

"Your enemies," he appended.

"I don't say so."

"No, *I* say so. Meanwhile, let us forget Porshinger and enjoy the music. You sure are a dancer, Stephanie!"

"So Sheldon says!" she smiled. "I'm delighted that I haven't lost that too"—then gave herself up to the slow languorous waltz, so intoxicating in its swing that it fairly lifted them up and bore them along without an effort.

"Thank you!" said Cameron, when it ended. "It was entrancing—simply entrancing! Don't dance so with Porshinger, I pray you; he may not be able to withstand temptation."

"I knew I could trust you, Steuart!" she laughed. "I'll be more prudent with the other."

And she was—dancing it in the formal way, with tight held body, yielding just sufficiently for the dance but not a shade more.

And Porshinger noted the difference; and he said, as the music ended:

"I'm afraid I'm rather an awkward dancer, Mrs. Lorraine. I don't seem to get on as I should."

"I did not notice it," she replied.

"At least, I didn't get on as Cameron or Burgoyne did."

"You must remember that I have danced with them for years—we know each other's steps."

"Yes, that may be it—for I can modestly say that I am not a poor dancer. It struck me that we were not in accord temperamentally—we didn't catch the spirit, so to speak. We were treading the minuet rather than dancing a two-step."

"You mean we were doing it decorously rather than in a romp!" she laughed. "I don't like rompish dancing, Mr. Porshinger."

"Nor do I; but there is a happy medium—as you showed with Burgoyne," he replied calmly. "That is what I had in mind."

"When you have known me as long as they have, our steps doubtless will fit as well also."

"Let us hope that it won't be so long deferred," he answered, bending down and whispering it confidentially in her ear. "When may I have another try—may I have the third from now?"

"I shall dance no more before the cotillon," she replied.

"Then sit out another with me," he pleaded—in the certain compelling manner he at times assumed; and which she tolerated because it amused her, and because it was Porshinger who did it—and she was playing a game.

"Here is the conservatory; let us investigate the abode of the flowers," he said.

She hesitated a moment, then permitted him to lead her in. She had seen Gladys Chamberlain just ahead of her.

"How charming! how entrancing!" she exclaimed, as they entered. "A veritable fairyland."

"It is very pretty," Porshinger agreed.

"You don't enthuse. Look how the light falls on the palms and the cactus and the rhododendron, yet you don't see whence it comes."

"It comes from the roof!" he laughed. "Nevertheless, I grant you the fairyland—a maze of flowers and foliage, with *you* the Fairy, madame."

"The Fairy-madame!" she laughed. "How romantic."

Gladys had disappeared, but other couples were strolling about.

"Which shows how important is a comma," he remarked. "Let us sit yonder," indicating two chairs well hidden by a palm, "while I enjoy my little trip into fairyland with the Fairy."

It was not far from the entrance and Stephanie complied.

"Do you know," he said presently, "we are almost quite concealed by this tree—what a charming place it is, so near and yet so far."

"Particularly so near!" she rejoined.

"And particularly so far!" he smiled, apparently all unconsciously letting his arm fall around her waist but without touching her.

The next moment he suddenly drew her to him and bent over.

"Just one," he said.

And before she could so much as struggle he kissed her on the lips.

"You vile coward!" she panted, held close in his arms yet writhing to be free. "You miserable cur! You——"

"Why struggle so, Stephanie—no one saw," he whispered. She was but pretending.

She tore herself loose—only to be caught back again and crushed closer.

"Let me go!—*Let me go!*" she gasped frantically.

This was no pretense, and he realized it. He had thought it would be otherwise—had thought that she would be a yielding beauty—and the mistake angered him. He was not given to making mistakes. She had drawn him on—and now——

"You didn't struggle so with Pendleton on the porch at Criss-Cross," he said, kissing her again and again. . . . "Aren't mine just as sweet and worth as much as his?"

Once more she tore herself loose and sprang away —made a step—then stopped and faced him.

He had risen and was moving slowly after, a mocking smile on his lips.

"You will please take me back to the ball-room," she commanded. "I am not minded to provoke comment by returning alone."

"I am always your most obedient servant," he replied, with a bow and another smile.

In silence they passed from the conservatory and into the ball-room a little way. There she dropped his arm.

"You will do me the favor of never speaking to me again," she said—and left him.

"Spirit!" he muttered, as he turned away. "Spirit—or a damn good player! I don't know which." He gave an admiring chuckle. "God! what a looker she is!"

XVI

THE UNANIMOUS OPINION

Lorraine did not come out of the Hospital in a week. It was two weeks before he quit it, and three weeks until he was able to leave his house and go down town and to the Clubs. He found a hearty welcome awaiting him from everyone; even those whom he knew but slightly shook his hand and congratulated him on his recovery.

Some of the men had dropped in at intervals—Cameron the most frequently, but Pendleton not at all—though they all were too busy to do more than inquire, and then forget him in the rush of affairs and Society. He heard occasionally of Stephanie—read in the Society news of her being at the Burlestons' and the Tazewells' and the Chamberlains', and others of her old friends who were loyal. Pendleton's name always was included; and once or twice he had noticed Porshinger's—with a frown. What was *he* doing there—how did *he* come to be included? He had intended to ask Cameron—but every time he had forgotten it until Cameron had gone.

The truth of the matter lay in the Chamberlain invitation. Porshinger had seen to it that that fact was promptly noted in all the papers, and Society—at first a bit gasping and incredulous—had been more or less quick to follow suit. If the Chamberlains were taking him up, who else could refuse? So Miss Taze-

well's fear was verified—as was Miss Chamberlain's prediction—that it was only a question of being first. True, neither Mrs. Porterfield nor Mrs. Postlewaite had given him the light of her countenance, but that would come in time—a reasonably short time. Just as soon as they were assured of his desirability, he would be formally viséd by them—and his social career would be easy henceforth.

It was the afternoon of the day after the Croyden dance that Lorraine first got up to the Otranto Club, and had his curiosity gratified—at least as to the reasons for Porshinger's inclusion.

He found Warwick Devereux absorbing a long, cold drink on the side piazza, and was hailed to participate.

"Mighty glad to see you around," said Devereux. "Must be a month since your accident."

"I'm mighty glad to get around," Lorraine replied. "What have you been doing while I was in a hospital?"

"Do you mean me individually, or is the question intended to include the social world in general?"

"Both—the latter first, if you don't mind; it will comprehend much of the former."

"Hum!" muttered Devereux. "I suppose that is meant to be courteous, Harry, but I don't know. Well, the main thing that we have been doing, we've been doing to ourselves—making damn fools of ourselves, to be accurate."

"That is interesting!" laughed Lorraine. "How did we manage to do it?"

"It doesn't require management to do it," the other remarked, draining his glass. "The management is required when we *don't* do it—only, on this particular occasion, we have been more than ordinarily successful at the damn-fool business."

"What have we done now?" Lorraine asked. "Break it gently, Devereux, break it gently!"

"We've been taking up that bounder Porshinger. By *we* I mean Society. We have been helping—no we've actually been dragging him up the wall with the gold chains and the gold ladder he has provided. Did you ever know such—asininity?"

"It's pretty bad," Lorraine agreed; "though I reckon it was about due. Porshinger was bound to get in so long as he didn't marry wrong, though I didn't think *we* would *lift* him over the wall. How do you explain it?"

"Naturally enough!" Devereux snorted. "Everyone was waiting for someone to start—but everyone was afraid to start. Then Gladys Chamberlain started—and the rest of the women followed like a lot of geese."

"Like a lot of geese is good," said Lorraine. "Society is like nothing so much as geese, in such matters. Yet what surprises me is that Gladys Chamberlain should take him up. She doesn't need his money, and it isn't possible that she likes him. I don't think she even knew him, certainly not more than to bow to, when I went on the injured list. Why is it, do you suppose?"

"It occurred suddenly down at Criss-Cross. Some

of us were there for the week-end; Porshinger was at the Woodsides'. Gladys announced at dinner that she was going to have him over, and asked our opinion. We gave it to her, Burgoyne and Cameron and Pendleton and I, but it didn't faze in the least. He came. We were courteous to him, of course. He was unassuming, but talked shop to the women beside him all through dinner—and there you are! The Rubicon was crossed."

"But *why* did Gladys do it?"

"Search me!" Devereux exclaimed.

"She is the last one to act on impulse in such a matter."

"Search me!" Devereux reiterated, with a lift of his hands. "Only, you don't want to try to explain things by the reasonable route—you won't succeed, Harry. Woman isn't a reasonable creature. She's an exotic, an eccentric, who doesn't always eccent."

"Is that a discovery?" asked Lorraine.

"Not at all," retorted Devereux. "It's a self-evident fact, that is why I told you. Understand?"

"Have another high-ball?" laughed Lorraine.

"Yes, thank you! . . . Harry," said he, as he poured the Scotch and slowly shot in the carbonated water, "it may be impertinent, it is *damned* impertinent, but you'll not misunderstand me—sometimes a friend's impertinence is a proof of his friendship.—What I want to say, old man, is this:" He pushed back his glass and looked at the other thoughtfully a moment. "Why don't you make it up with Stephanie?"

"For the simplest of reasons, Devereux," Lorraine responded. "She won't make it up."

"She won't make it up!" Warwick marvelled. "Have you tried her?"

Lorraine nodded.

"Before my accident—and later at the Hospital," he said. "It was respectfully declined."

"She surely doesn't mean it! She would be a—it would be most extraordinary."

"Stephanie's an extraordinary woman. Moreover, I can't blame her. She can't forget, I think, the day of her return and my denial of her before them all on this very piazza."

"You were a fool!" exclaimed Devereux pithily.

"You're putting it mildly!" Lorraine admitted—"but—oh, well—she came so suddenly, so absolutely unexpectedly that I acted before I thought."

"I can understand, but—Stephanie can't."

"Stephanie can't—and she won't. She won't accept any excuse. She says that if I'd been a proper sort of husband Amherst wouldn't have had a chance."

"Which is peculiar reasoning," Devereux commented:—"If you don't guard me, you're to blame if I go wrong."

"Woman is an exotic—an eccentric!" quoted Lorraine.

"She is. Do you need any further demonstration to prove it? And are you not going to try to persuade her?" Devereux demanded.

"I am, indeed."

"That's right, Lorraine—don't give up! You

started wrong, very wrong—end right. Stephanie's worth it—despite the past."

"The past be damned!" Lorraine exclaimed. "I've forgot it—buried it. So far as she is concerned, it never existed. But——" he brought his fist down on the table till the glasses jumped and rattled—"it's another thing with Amherst!—it's another thing with Amherst! Sometime, Devereux, sometime——" he ended with a gesture.

"I know how you feel, old man," said Warwick soothingly, "and I reckon I'd feel like you do; but Amherst is gone, and I don't imagine will be back for years—if ever. You just forget him. If you had done something at the time the law would have been lenient—but not now. Moreover, it will only renew the scandal and react upon Stephanie. Oh! I know it's hard to let him go—but it's the wise course now.—If only you *had* broken his head at the time, or filled him full of lead! Now your opportunity is gone, and you must put the idea away from you."

Lorraine beat on the table and said nothing; and Devereux, after watching him a moment, said nothing more. Lorraine was a weak character, whom opposition sometimes makes the more determined. And while Warwick did not care particularly for him, he wanted to save Stephanie the embarrassment that a revival of the affair would be sure to cause. So far as the two men were concerned, they might fight it out and welcome—and if they killed each other, it would not be much loss to the world.

From which it may be seen that Pendleton's view-

point was the view-point of Devereux—as well as of most of the men.

Presently Lorraine spoke.

"I wonder where Amherst is?" he said.

"Abroad," Devereux answered.

"I mean, where abroad?"

"In Siberia or the Congo or Australia or anywhere that's far off. I should bury myself."

"More than likely he is in London or Paris," Lorraine insisted.

"More than likely he is," Devereux admitted. "I hear that he has converted all his real estate, and has slipped his moorings for good and all."

"You mean that he is never coming back?"

"Such is the report from an authentic source, I'm told."

Lorraine smiled a bit grimly.

"*Never* is a long time," he said. "I'll not believe it—and I shall hope not until I die.—Someway—somehow—I'm going to square off with Amherst. It may be years, yet I shall do it—and do it well."

"What if Stephanie and you make it up—you won't think then of harming Amherst?" said Devereux.

"No—I suppose not—at least, not openly; but if we don't make it up——" another gesture ended the sentence.

Devereux frowned and was about to answer; then he pulled himself up, and with the slightest lift of his eyebrows busied himself with his drink. There was

no use in arguing with Lorraine—he would not know his own mind more than an hour anyway.

"There is another contingency, Lorraine," said he:—"Suppose you don't succeed in effecting a reconciliation with Stephanie—what then?"

"I'll never give up trying," Lorraine replied.

"But if your efforts after a time prove fruitless, will persistence be of any avail? Won't it simply make her more irreconcilable and unyielding?"

"You mean will I divorce her—or permit her to obtain a divorce?"

Devereux nodded.

"Most assuredly not!" Lorraine declared. "If *I'm* not to have her, who belongs to me, none else shall."

"Sort of a dog in the manger business?" Devereux smiled.

"Not at all.—I'm simply keeping what is mine."

"Not exactly—you will be keeping what *was* yours but is yours no longer."

"You think that I should let her go?"

"If a reconciliation is impossible, I think that you should let her go. What is more, you should make it possible for *her* to get the divorce."

"You mean I should admit——"

"Not at all—though that is a minor matter, and wouldn't hurt you in the least if you were to admit it; under the circumstances, you are entitled to break over. However, that is neither here nor there; she can procure a divorce for non-support—if you don't contest it."

"Yes—if I don't contest it!" Lorraine sneered. "One might fancy that you contemplated marrying her yourself, Devereux."

"I don't contemplate marrying her, and you know it," said Devereux imperturbably; "though for my part, I should consider myself very fortunate indeed to win her. But someone else probably *will* want to marry her, and she may want to marry him—and you will be only the dog in the manger, Lorraine, only the dog in the manger—with the sympathy of not one soul in all the world."

"I don't care for sympathy!" Lorraine exclaimed —"and I shouldn't get it if I did—from you men. You always favor a pretty woman. You all have been against me from the first. You think it was all my fault Amherst had a chance to ingratiate himself."

"Wasn't it?" Devereux asked.

Lorraine stopped and stared.

"They went off together, didn't they—was that my doing?" he demanded.

"Not directly—but indi——"

"Am I responsible for what a low-down dog like Amherst does? Hadn't I a right to presume he wouldn't do it? Hadn't I a right to trust my own wife? Is a husband to be suspicious and suspecting? Isn't he justified in presuming innocence rather than guilt?"

"As a general proposition, yes; varied, however, by the *dramatis personae*—and the circumstances."

"What should I have done?" Lorraine demanded.

"Anything but what you did do," returned Devereux kindly. "But that isn't the question that confronts you now, and is up to you for decision, and which you alone can decide. Don't make another blunder; you can't afford it—and neither can Stephanie." He leaned forward and put his hand on the other's knee. "Consider well, Lorraine. Stephanie and you are young—the world is before you. Make it as easy going for both of you as you can. You are a long time dead, remember."

"At least when we're dead we're done!" Lorraine broke out.

"Maybe you are—but I haven't heard of anyone who knows; and you'd best not chance it when it is so easy to do the right thing now."

"And the right thing is?" asked Lorraine sarcastically.

"What is best for you both—if you can't be reconciled, then be divorced."

Lorraine smiled a sickly smile, and made no answer.

"Gratuitous advice is rarely acceptable, I know," Devereux went on, "but it is honest and well meant, and comes from a life-long friend of you both. Now, Lorraine, we will say no more on the subject."—He struck the bell. "Take Mr. Lorraine's order," he said to the waiter.

But Lorraine shook his head.

"I think I've had enough," he replied—"both of liquor and the Club, for this time. I'm going home and think it over. I'm a bit tired and out of sorts.

So long!" and went slowly out, got into his car and drove off.

Devereux watched him meditatively until he was gone; then he too shook his head—and sat drumming on the chair-arm with his finger tips.

"What is it?" asked Pendleton, who had approached from the rear. "What do you see, Dev—a pretty girl?"

"Do I look it?" said Devereux, glancing around.

"Now that you favor me with your full countenance, I can't say that you do," the other smiled, swinging a chair around for his feet and sitting down. "You are evidently bunkered or have topped your drive. I beg your pardon for intruding—don't let me interrupt, I pray."

"I wasn't playing mental golf—I was thinking."

"I see," said Pendleton. "A good occupation—continue to think, if it isn't too exhausting."

"I was thinking and wondering," Devereux continued—"why Stephanie Mourraille married Lorraine. What in the devil's name did she see in him anyway!—What *could* she see in him!"

"Qualities which you and I and the other men are blind to," said Montague dryly. "Woman has the power of endowing the man with whom she imagines she is in love, with every attribute that he should normally possess—and rarely does. We're all deficient, Devereux, at the Bar of Popular Opinion—it is only a matter of degree."

"Well, I should say that Lorraine is the maximum degree—and then some," was the reply.—"And

that Stephanie knows it at last—when it is too late. Why didn't you marry her, Pendleton? Everyone thought *you* were willing—and *she* ought to have been."

Pendleton sent a smoke whirling upward, and followed it with another, and another—but said no word.

"It's a bit personal, I know—and you shouldn't answer," Devereux admitted—"but all the same, why didn't you?"

"Maybe Stephanie wouldn't have me," said Pendleton slowly.

"The more fool she!" the other exclaimed. "Yet it's like a woman—they never know what is best for them when they have a choice to make—at least, they choose wrong thirty-five times out of fifty."

"And forty-five out of fifty they think they are the winning fifteen—and fifty times out of fifty, it is no one's business but their own," Pendleton replied.

"You're right in theory," Devereux admitted, "but you're wrong in practice. We have some business with our friends' affairs—enough to regret when we see one of them, especially a woman, going on the rocks from very heedlessness of the buoys that mark the channel."

"Why not chain in the channel so they can't get out of it?" asked Pendleton.

"They would break the chains from very perversity and go on the rocks just the same," Devereux averred. "The only way is to provide a pilot who won't run amuck."

"You're mixing your metaphors, old man!"

"Maybe I am, but you know what I mean."

"Stephanie chose a pilot," Pendleton reminded him.

"Not at all—she chose a blockhead—a fool. Now she is paying the price for her error—and I'm mighty sorry for her. The simpleton now is crazy to effect a reconciliation, says he will never give her up, and vows vengeance on Amherst. I advised him, if he can't effect the reconciliation—which of course he can't—to let Stephanie divorce him. But nay! nay! If *he* can't have her no one shall have her, he declares—she is his wife and she is going to stay his wife—et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. It makes me sick! I asked him why, for Stephanie's sake, he didn't forget Amherst and not stir up the nasty scandal afresh? He answered that he would do nothing if she returned to him, but if she did not, he would——" He imitated Lorraine's gesture. "I don't know what that gesture means, but I assume it threatens something dire."

"And the pity of it is that he is just a big enough fool to do it," said Pendleton. "If he had acted at once, and shot Amherst down for the vicious beast he is, everyone would have been glad and the deed would have been amply justified. Now it is worse than foolish—it's asinine."

"Just so," Devereux responded. "You can't blame him, of course, for feeling bitter, but I haven't any sympathy for him now—he has shilly-shallied so long he would best forget it. Altogether Stephanie seems to have made a devil of a mess of it—with her husband, and the Amherst matter, and coming back

the way she did, and refusing Lorraine's overtures for a reconciliation, and *now* his attitude. It makes a pretty problem in human frailties—and mistakes. There isn't a thing about the whole affair that is normal. Why in thunder didn't Lorraine get killed in the recent accident? No one would ever have missed him!"

"Those that will never be missed are usually the ones that can't be killed," Pendleton remarked. "However, so long as Amherst stays away there will be no killing—and Lorraine, in the meantime, may see reason. Let us hope for it—for Stephanie's sake."

"And if Lorraine does go into the killing business, I trust he will make a thorough job of it and wipe out both Amherst and himself. Clean the slate!"

"A clean slate for a fresh start," said Pendleton.

Devereux looked keenly at him.

"For a fresh start?" he inflected tentatively.

But Pendleton had resumed his smoke rings—and for a time there was silence.

Presently Devereux spoke:

"I didn't see you at the Croyden's last night."

"I wasn't there," replied Pendleton. "I came in from New York this morning. Was it interesting?"

"The Croyden functions are always interesting—some more so than others, but any of them will do for mine, thank you!—Lucky chap, Croyden!"

Pendleton nodded. "Not many girls would have done what Elaine Cavendish did: throw convention overboard and—because Croyden was poor and

wouldn't, and she was rich and loved him—bridge the chasm and made it easy for him to cross to her."

"Elaine's a girl in a million!" Devereux declared. "I wish there were some more of that sort."

"Would you pick one?" Pendleton asked.

"Would I pick one? Well, rather, my friend."

"Why didn't you pick Elaine?"

"I wanted to but she wouldn't be picked—by me."

"I can't remember that you fussed her especially."

"I can't remember it myself; but I reckon I read my doom beforehand, and didn't go up against it. Elaine is a winner for looks, Pendleton. She was the loveliest thing last night I most ever saw—in a shimmering silver gown and—there was only one woman who was her equal in looks: Stephanie Lorraine. *She's* unbeatable—simply unbeatable!"

"I'm sorry I wasn't there!" laughed Pendleton.

"You should have been there. That bounder Porshinger was playing the devoted to her—had her in the conservatory for a half an hour." He glanced slyly at the other. "So long, indeed, as to occasion comment. I overhead some of the dowager tabby-cats mewing over it." He paused a moment, then asked seriously: "Pendleton, why don't you warn her of Porshinger's attentions? *You* can do it. He is up to no good, you may be sure—at least, no one will ever credit him with any good where Stephanie is concerned. You understand, old chap."

"Do you mean that people will suspect *her?*" Pendleton demanded.

"You and I and her other friends and the right-

minded people won't, but there are a lot who will. It well be a fresh bit for them to roll over their tongues and to infer and imply the scandalous. The question is whether she can afford to have them do it—now."

"She is simply courteous and nice to him," Pendleton replied.

"I know she is. Yet why not be simply courteous, and let it go at that; what is the good of being *nice* to him?"

"No good at all—but——"

"I told Gladys she would regret having Porshinger to Criss-Cross. It's all due to that Sunday, damn it!"

"I don't think so," Pendleton said, with a shake of his head. "It may have accelerated it by a few weeks—Porshinger was sure to get in anyway."

"Get in! Of course he would get in!" Devereux exclaimed. "But he wouldn't have come in through the Chamberlain doorway—nor have had any opportunity to know Stephanie well. I can't see what Gladys meant by it—and yet she must have had some object. She is the last to do things on impulse."

"Here she comes—you might ask her," Pendleton remarked, as Miss Chamberlain appeared on the piazza through one of the low French-windows.

Both men arose and bowed.

"May I sit down?" she said. "I'm tired out and—thirsty. Get me some tea, please—and some toast, the soft kind." She removed her gloves and put up her veil. "It is charming here."

"*Now* it is!" said Devereux.

"Warwick," she smiled, "I've long ago learned that when you flatter you want something! What is it? Out with it."

"He must be in a condition of perpetual want," Pendleton derided.

"When Gladys is around, I am," Devereux agreed. "She keeps me on starvation rations, don't you know."

"Isn't that better than letting you starve?" Gladys asked.

"It is not comparable to being well fed," he responded.

"I can't devote all my time to providing for the needy," she smiled.

"You might at least give me the time you confer on Mr. Porshinger."

"So—that is the fly in the ointment, is it?" she asked.

"You're likely to find before you are through with him that you're the fly and not Porshinger," retorted Devereux.

"Then I shall look to you and Montague to come promptly to my rescue and fish me out."

"It would have been wiser never to have got in. However, as first aid to the injured, Monte and I are some class—and we're likely to be called on to fish someone else than you out of the ointment—that is to say, out of your friend Porshinger's clutches."

"I confess that I don't understand you," said Gladys. "Do you, Montague?"

"Do you, Montague?" sarcasmed Devereux.

"Well, seeing that we're just discussing the matter when you blew along, I sort of reckon he does. Tell the lady what it is, Monte; you advised me to ask her."

"Tell her yourself, you tattle-tale!" laughed Pendleton. "Gladys will understand the spirit in which *I* said it."

"You must admit that you didn't and don't approve!"

"Certainly—as I've already told Gladys; but I've not asked for her reasons. They are her own, I take it."

"And I'm just curious, you think? Well, let it go at that. I am curious, I admit it, to know—and Pendleton advised me to ask you, Gladys—why *you* invited Porshinger to Criss-Cross the other Sunday? You see what has been the result: the bars are down. Why did you do it?"

"Because I wanted to do it," she replied sweetly.

"Undoubtedly. You don't do much that you don't want to do—but what was your ulterior motive?"

"Was it so bad as that?" Gladys asked.

"Worse—far worse, I suspect."

"Then don't voice it—keep it dark."

"I will. I'll go away and leave you with Pendleton—and with an insane curiosity to know just what I suspect. In fact, you will give him no rest until he tells you.—See?" and with a laugh and a nod he arose and strolled away.

Gladys watched him with an amused smile until he turned the corner of the piazza—then she spoke.

"He doesn't suspect the real reason?" she asked.

Pendleton shook his head rather shortly.

"No more than that there *was* a reason," he answered. "A reason which, I fear, was very foolish and absurd. You see where it has led and is leading? —Were you at the Croydens last night?"

"For a little while."

"Did you see Stephanie?"

"Only for a moment."

"Where?"

"I don't recollect—in the drawing-room, I think."

"Was Porshinger with her?"

"Not that I remember."

"It is none of my affair, perhaps—more than a friend—but do you think it wise for Stephanie to have Porshinger dangling around her so much? I've been away for two weeks, and Devereux says that he has become exceedingly attentive recently—so much so, indeed, as to occasion comment of not the kindest sort.—I don't want to say anything to her on the matter, but *you* can—so, if you consider it expedient, you might mention it to her."

"Why don't you mention it yourself, Montague? You have the most influence with Stephanie, surely!"

"I don't think so," he replied, with a bit of a smile.

"A quarrel?" she asked.

He nodded. "Just before I went to Boston.—It's nothing serious, but I'm not exactly in a position to influence her until we have made it up."

"Then why don't you make it up?" Gladys demanded. "You would think you two were children."

"We *are* children. I'm ready to make it up any time, but I don't want to start it by finding fault with her recent conduct. It would hardly be conducive to the makeup, do you think?"

"The idea of Stephanie and you having a misunderstanding!" she exclaimed. "You ought to be sent back to the nursery—you overgrown infants."

"Granted again," he agreed.

"Whose fault was it?"

"Both, I imagine, to be accurate."

"Do you mind telling me what it was about?"

"No—I don't mind telling *you*, Gladys. It was about Porshinger. I cautioned Stephanie about letting him show her attention. She—well, one thing led to another and—we quarrelled. I had to leave town the following morning. I wrote to her from Boston; I was there a week, and she never replied to the letter."

"Maybe she didn't get it."

"Not likely; moreover, I passed her on Fifth Avenue last week—and she never saw me."

"*Did* she see you?" Gladys asked.

"Certainly she saw me; she looked straight at me."

"And *you* didn't speak?"

"Of course I didn't speak."

"Wasn't it just as much in your place to speak as in hers?" Gladys inflected.

"I thought not. My letter put it up to her."

"If she had received it. If not?"

"I'm assuming that she received it. Not many letters go astray."

"Why didn't you ask her if she had received it?"

"Would you?" he laughed.

"No—I think I wouldn't—but I'm a woman, you're a *man*."

"And my action was womanish, not mannish, you imply!"

She acquiesced with a nod and a smile.

"You might expect it from Stephanie—and excuse it; but I've not much patience with you, Montague Pendleton!"

"I see you haven't!" Pendleton grinned. "Well, I'm properly humble and contrite."

"According to your idea of the proper humbleness and contrition, I suppose," Gladys retorted.

"Which, however, is beside the way," he suggested. "Let us get back on the original road. I'll ask Stephanie if she received my letter, if you'll do what you can to make her see reason in the Porshinger matter. The latter is too sore a subject for me to broach, until you have had your say."

"Aren't you unduly sensitive! She hasn't done anything but be nice to him."

"She has done enough to provoke talk and 'set the old tabby-cats mewing,' as Devereux says—he heard them mewing at the Croydens. I don't like it, Gladys. Stephanie is hurting her chances for complete rehabilitation because of a foolish notion, as you know, and——"

"I don't know that it is foolish," Gladys interrupted.

"Well it is, nevertheless—and because of her quarrel with me. She's headstrong and a bit wilful and we must look out for her—you and I."

"Which *you* proceed to do by quarrelling with her."

"I was justified in quarrelling with her—you should have heard what she said. However, I admit that in this instance justification isn't an excuse. I'll apologize and make a fresh start—if she will let me."

"She'll let you!" laughed Gladys.

"Has she mentioned our quarrel to you?" he asked eagerly.

"Not a word—but if you show the proper spirit, she'll be only too glad to make up. I know it—trust me. You are the one man, Montague, whom she will permit to advise her."

"She didn't permit it—she resented it."

"Because you went at it in the wrong way. Stephanie Lorraine is the easiest girl in the world to manage if you handle her right—but if you don't——" an expressive shrug ended the sentence. "I think she has become more so, since the Amherst affair—which is entirely natural."

"I know it. I should have made every allowance for her," Pendleton concurred. "I'll fix it up with her if she will let me."

Miss Chamberlain smiled satisfiedly.

"She will let you, never fear, as I said before." She drank the last of her tea and put down the cup.

"I just learned today," she said, "that shortly after Stephanie's return a resolution was introduced, by one of Lorraine's friends on the Board of Governors, requesting her resignation; that after a desperate fight it was held over until the next meeting—when it was voluntarily withdrawn by the mover. Is it true?"

"It is true—but I didn't know it had got out," he answered.

"I heard it only this morning. It was pretty well kept—for a Board secret."

"Yes—about four weeks overtime. Why is it that some one on the Board always leaks?"

"Why is it that almost everyone on the Board leaks?" she amended. "Talk about women not being able to keep a secret. If there is anything more gossippy and leaky than a man's club, I should like to know it."

He smiled tolerantly, with a good-natured air.

"Different sexes, different minds," he replied.

"But the same delight in gossip!" she retorted. "However, to return to the road, as you would say. What caused Lorraine's friend to have a change of heart, do you suppose?"

"Lorraine's accident and Stephanie's visit to him at the Hospital occurred on the same evening the Governors met. The postponement of the resolution was owing, I understand, to a hard fight by a couple of her friends on the Board. The subsequent action of the proposer was due to these facts—and to Lorraine's request."

"I see," nodded Miss Chamberlain. "Altogether that first visit to the Hospital—and the subsequent one—were the two wisest, most politic things Stephanie ever did. They accomplished more for her rehabilitation than she could have effected in a year's time. Even the Queen P's were mollified and were disposed to be nice—which Stephanie hasn't let them be yet, however. She *is* a bit wilful, Montague."

"She may be wilful in her resolve not to accept Lorraine's offer of reconciliation," said Pendleton. "What is your opinion?"

"On the ground of expediency, it would be better, beyond all question, for her to accept," said Gladys, "but if it were I—I'd die first. I fancy Stephanie is of the same mind."

"I fancy she is," Pendleton agreed.

Just then Stephanie herself appeared in the doorway.

She saw Gladys, and smiled and came toward her—not seeing Pendleton, who had his back toward her and was hidden by the tall chair in which he was sitting.

"Hello!" said Gladys.—"Come and join me in a cup of tea."

Pendleton slowly arose and turned—and Stephanie stopped short with a smothered exclamation!

XVII

DOLITTLE'S TALE

SHE recovered herself instantly—and took Pendleton's outstretched hand.

It was a lifeless hand she gave him, however. It said plainly to him that it was offered out of respect to the conventionalities and nothing more. And her smile was as purely formal as the handshake. There was no warmth in either.

"I did not mean to intrude," she remarked.

"Intrude!" marvelled Gladys.—"Why what an idea, Stephanie! Montague and I are not—now if I were someone else, it might be apropos. This tea is cold—let me order another pot."

Pendleton went over and pushed the bell.

"I don't care for any tea, thank you," said Stephanie.—"I'm going to town in a moment."

"I'll ride with you, if you wait a few minutes until I telephone," offered Gladys. "I may be able to hasten it if I call up at once. Excuse me a moment!" and she hurried into the house.

Pendleton repressed a smile and bowed.

"Won't you sit down, Mrs. Lorraine?" he suggested.

She shrugged her shoulders ever so slightly, and took the chair he offered her.

"This is an awkward situation, Mr. Pendleton," she observed, "but it will last but a moment—and if

you will bear with me, I'll see that it doesn't happen again."

"Suppose I want it to happen again—many times," he said, leaning forward.

Another shrug of the shapely shoulders.

"You're asking me to believe impossibilities," she returned.

"I'll make them very real, if you will promise to try to believe them."

A third time the shoulders did duty.

"I suppose Miss Chamberlain has been made aware of the state of affairs and is trying to give you a chance to apologize," she remarked.

"And I take the chance.—I apologize, Stephanie! most sincerely and humbly apologize."

"For what?"

"For anything I did or said that I shouldn't."

"That you shouldn't," she repeated.—"Who is to be the judge of what you *shouldn't* have done or said? That was just the point on which we split—you thought you should and I thought you shouldn't."

"I am willing to let *you* be the judge," he replied.

"Then you confess that you went beyond all bounds?"

"I will."

"And were arbitrary and dictatorial?"

"I will."

"And unkind in your inferences and conclusions?"

"Even that I will confess.—You know that I had

no intention of being either unkind, nor arbitrary, nor dictatorial."

"I know only what you said at the time, Mr. Pendleton; from it there was no other conclusion to draw. However, it won't profit us to discuss it now—you've apologized; I accept the apology on the condition that you don't offend again."

"But I'm going to offend again. At least, I'm going to speak frankly about a matter, in the hope that you'll not be offended—but that if you are offended you'll be warned nevertheless—and heed the warning. Shall I proceed?"

"You may use your own judgment," she returned.

"First, I want to ask if you received my letter, written from Boston the day after our—quarrel?"

"I did not."

The servant came with the tea and toast, and placed them on the table.

"How many lumps, Mrs. Lorraine?" the man asked, sugar tongs poised.

"I'll serve it—you may go!" said Stephanie. Then she looked at Pendleton. "Did you write me a letter?"

"I most assuredly did!" he replied.

"Do you care to tell me what was in it?"

"It was mainly an apology for what had occurred the previous evening."

"What else was in it?"

He smiled—"Nothing much—just a word or two of—regard."

She poured the tea, and broke off a bit of toast.

"I think," she remarked, examining the toast critically, yet watching Pendleton the while furtively from under the long lashes, "I think that letter alters the proposition somewhat. You did the decent thing promptly—and I'm sorry I didn't know it. I too said things that I didn't mean—and if you'll forgive *me*, Montague," holding out her hand to him, with a bewitching smile, "we will start afresh."

"If I'll forgive you, sweetheart!" he exclaimed.

She withdrew her hand and held up a warning finger—though the smile still lingered undimmed—then she nodded ever so slightly.

"My dear Stephanie, I'll forgive *you* anything when you look at me like that!" he breathed.

"I'm always ready to look at you like that, if you won't find fault with me when I've been abominable," she whispered.—"No, stay where you are—you forget we're on the Club-house piazza."

He made a motion of resignation and sank back in his chair.

"I should not have said it if we hadn't been there—and broad day besides," she observed.

He smiled his answer.

"Moreover, Montague, you know that all such little demonstrations are strictly forbidden," she warned.

"When will they be permitted?" he demanded, leaning close to her.

"Who knows?" she answered. "Who can read the future—such a future as mine, my friend."

"I will essay it," he replied.

She laughed softly.

"*You*, Montague!" she said.

"Yes—may I try it?"

She shook her head. "It wouldn't be wise. It might raise false hopes; and a football of fate hasn't any right to hopes—they are too expensive of disappointment."

"How do you know what I shall read?" he asked.

"You wouldn't venture to read anything that wasn't nice."

"I'll read what I see," said he;—"and the first thing I see is far from nice."

She regarded him a moment thoughtfully—and he waited.

"What is it?" she asked finally.

"It is—Porshinger!" he answered—and braced himself for the explosion.

And it came—though not in the way he had anticipated.

"Porshinger! Porshinger!" she cried tensely—her sensitive nostrils aquiver, her eyes flashing, her cheeks suddenly aflame. "I hate him!—I hate him! He's a beast, Montague, a beast!"

"There isn't a doubt of it, sweetheart," he said soothingly. "I rejoice that you have found him out at last."

"I *always* knew it—but I didn't think he would dare try his ways with me."

"What did he do, dear?" Pendleton asked—"was it at the Croydens' last night?"

"Yes—in the conservatory.—He—kissed me by

force—and repeated it at least half a dozen times before he released me.—I did nothing to tempt him, Montague—*absolutely nothing!*"

"Except to be nice to him," Pendleton added quietly—"which *he* isn't able to understand."

"Isn't able to understand in Stephanie Lorraine—with her past!" she said bitterly.

"That is the bounder in him," he explained.

"He thought, because I went wrong with Amherst, that every man could be an Amherst—if he only had the opportunity!" she exclaimed.

"Did he say *that?*"

"He laughed and said: 'Why struggle so—no one sees us?'"

"He *is* a beast!" Pendleton gritted.

"And when I did break from him, he caught me back again, saying: 'You didn't struggle so the other night with Pendleton,' and kissed me again and again, whispering:—'aren't mine just as sweet and worth as much as his?'"

"My God!" cried Pendleton.—"Did he see me that night at Criss-Cross?"

"I think so—at least the day after, when he came there to dine, he let me infer from what he said that he had seen—I never told you, because I might have been wrong—and I didn't want to worry you."

For a brief space Pendleton did not trust himself to answer, if indeed he had the power, so overcome was he by shame and anger, and the rush of hatred that well nigh choked him. Then it passed, and he was cool and calm—preternaturally so, indeed—

though the intensity of his feelings was betrayed by the flashing of his eyes. His first words were a confession of his own atrocious error.

"My poor Stephanie! I am shamed beyond words—to have brought this thing upon you by my folly."

"You are not responsible—it's myself," she said evenly. "Do you think that he would have dared it but for the Amherst affair?"

"I gave him courage—I am guilty too," he objected.

"You don't know the man. He thinks everything must bow before him—thinks he can buy anyone if he but have a chance—thinks every woman has her price—and that I am openly for sale. He can't understand that what a woman may do once, she would burn at the stake rather than do again. He's a beast! Montague, a beast!"

"A human beast unfortunately—whom one can't kill with impunity," Pendleton reflected. "Moreover, I doubt if it would be wise to kill him."

"Good Heavens! No!" she cried.

"Neither do I know just how the matter ought to be handled. Of course, you will ignore him in the future——"

"I shall never *see* him!" she declared.

"But if he sees you—forces himself upon you——"

"He would not dare."

"He *would* dare! He is vile enough to dare anything—to do anything. He has no notion of de-

cency nor of right when it crosses his purposes. He has neither conscience nor shame. He is what you styled him: a beast—a vicious beast, I should add."

"What would *you* do with a vicious beast of his kind who forces himself upon you?" she asked.

"I should take care to have some one always with me," he replied slowly—"and I should appeal instantly for protection, if he made the slightest attempt to intrude."

"And suffer him to circulate some horrible tale about me?"

"You have to chance that," Pendleton answered. "If he does, your friends will then be in a position to make such a protest as he will be apt to remember."

"Meanwhile, the harm will be done," she replied.

"If he *can* harm you," he observed. "You're a trifle too sensitive of your position, dear. It is not what it was—when you returned. Surely your word is equal to Porshinger's."

"Many will be glad to believe his story—whatever it is," she protested. "You see, I was friendly with him—and my past is—not in my favor."

"Those who believe it, you won't any longer want to know; nor need you care for them—you will be well rid of them. And your past is *past;* don't let it worry you, sweetheart. You're obsessed by it."

"I'm afraid I don't know just what obsessed means, Montague," she said, with a wan little smile.

"You attach undue importance to it; you've—got it on the brain, so to speak," he explained.

"I see," she said slowly. "Maybe I have it on

the brain—but it's very natural under all the circumstances—and when I'm trying to live down my past. It's dreadfully hard, Montague, dreadfully hard for a woman to live down her past. You men can never know how hard it is—you have no past."

"You make it harder than it is, Stephanie," he said, "though I think that no one knows it except me—you conceal your feelings marvellously well."

"Thank you, Montague—I have tried to hide them from this cold and heartless world we call Society. And I *have* been indiscreet, I know. Striving to appear indifferent, I overdid the part. It *was* foolish of me to encourage Porshinger, even a little. I ought to have realized what a dangerous man he is—I ought to have been warned by you, instead of showing anger at your well meant and entirely justifiable protest. I have only myself to blame—which makes it all the harder."

"Nonsense! dear.—You did what you thought was right, and because you thought it was right—and because you feared lest Porshinger would injure me. Now we are going to stand together—and let Lorraine help you, if he will—without any obligation on your part," he added, as she made a vehement gesture of protest. "We shall see whether he has sufficient manhood to defend his wife if Porshinger starts his slanderous tales."

"Suppose his first tale is of—us—and what he saw on the Criss-Cross piazza?" she remarked.

"I will deny it."

"And what—shall I do?"

"You need do nothing—except preserve the dignity of silence."

"But if my husband hearkens to the story, and demands an explanation from us both?"

"Still the same course for us," Pendleton replied:—"You indignant silence—me denial."

"And have Society in general laugh knowingly and believe—and even our friends accept the denial hesitatingly."

"What other course can you suggest?" he asked.

"There is but one other course—tell the truth," she said.

"And raise a greater scandal—and put you in Porshinger's power?" he objected. "If you admit his tale as to me, won't you practically admit whatever he may choose to say regarding his own experience with you?"

"You may be right!" she said wearily. "I do not know—whatever you think best I shall do."

"I've got you into this miserable difficulty and I shall——"

"My dear Montague, dismiss that idea. I got myself in it by my own insane actions with Amherst."

"And I gave Porshinger the occasion he needed by the fight here and the kiss at Criss-Cross. I tell you I'm more to blame than are you." He leaned over close. "If Lorraine would only divorce you, dear—and you would marry *me* you wouldn't need care for Porshinger's tales. They would have lost their point, and no one worth while would ever give them a thought."

"My *dear* friend," she exclaimed, looking at him with a serious smile, "it is not for such as I to think of marriage. I have made too fearful a mess of the one that still binds me."

"That it still *binds* you is the material point—nothing else matters to me."

She sighed and leaned back.

"What if Lorraine does not believe your denial?" she suggested.

"I think he will believe it," Pendleton replied. "He asked me at the Hospital—it was the day I returned from Criss-Cross—to look out for you—to protect you from yourself."

"You never told me," she interrupted.

"No—I never told you—and I proceeded almost immediately to quarrel with you like a little boy."

"Because of his request?" she smiled.

"Forgetful of his request," he said contritely. "I've been a poor sort of friend to you, Stephanie. I never was Lorraine's friend and I think he knew it; I fancy that was why he asked me to look out for you—but I've done it atrociously. I'm a miserable——"

"You are the best friend I have, Montague!" she exclaimed, leaning forward and putting her hand on his arm,—"the best friend a woman ever had—you believe in me still, after I've done everything to forfeit your trust."

"I do—I'm only too glad to believe in you, sweetheart."

"You mustn't call me sweetheart, dear—I mean,"

with a rush of color to her cheeks, "I mean, you must not *now*.—It is unwise—and some one may overhear."

"And when we're where no one can *overhear?*" he whispered.

The entrancing smile flashed for an instant across her face.

"Wait until then," she answered. "We have more serious matters confronting us. What shall we do in event of Porshinger effecting anything against me, directly or by his tales? I'm fearfully afraid, Montague, fearfully afraid!"

"Don't be afraid, Stephanie, don't be afraid!" he counselled. "Let us do as I suggested—it is the best plan.—Here comes Gladys; does she know about Porshinger?"

"No—I've not told her yet," she said hastily.—"Yes, it was a very gorgeous affair—we're discussing the Croyden Ball, my dear"—as Miss Chamberlain came up, "but then all their affairs are gorgeous and in exquisite taste."

"They are, indeed," assented Gladys; "but I thought that last night they surpassed themselves. I never saw anything so charming as the conservatory. You know how huge it is, and there wasn't a light visible, yet the illumination was so subtly subdued that you seemed to see all about you, and yet you didn't—you know what I mean, Montague. I'm a bit vague——"

"Precisely!" said Pendleton. "You couldn't trust yourself to believe anything that you thought you saw"—and he shot a glance at Stephanie.

"You have it exactly, just the idea I intended to convey!" she laughed. "You are a very satisfactory man—isn't he, Stephanie?"

"I'm not committing myself by any rash admissions," Stephanie smiled—and Gladys knew that the quarrel was ended.

Just then a motor car, driven at reckless speed, dashed over the hill and up to the Club-house—and Harry Lorraine sprang out.

Gladys glanced swiftly at Stephanie and around to Pendleton.

"I see him," said Stephanie quietly.

"He seems to be in a bit of a hurry," Pendleton remarked, as Lorraine hastily crossed the piazza and said a word to the doorman.

The latter saluted and replied.

Lorraine turned quickly in their direction—then hurried over.

"He is coming here!" said Gladys wonderingly; while Stephanie frowned slightly, and Pendleton began to drum lightly on one knee.

"I hope you will pardon me if I'm intruding," Lorraine apologized as he came up, "but I've a matter that won't bear delay—at least it won't bear delay according to my view.—May I sit down?"

He looked at Stephanie, and she, with a glance at the others, answered indifferently.

"If you wish."

"I telephoned to your house, Stephanie," Lorraine went on, "and they said you were here, so I came straight back—and I'm fortunate to find Gladys and

Pendleton with you, for they are your friends and they will stand by you, I know."

He was greatly agitated; his tones were high-pitched, his words bitten off short, and his hands trembled with nervousness or with the tension of his feelings.

"We will stand by Stephanie you may be sure," said Pendleton—"as we have stood by her in the past."

"And as I haven't!" Lorraine exclaimed. "You're right, I haven't—but I'm trying to stand by her now. Do you know what I overheard Billy Dolittle telling old Baringdale this morning?—It was this—he said that in the conservatory at the Croydens' last night he saw my wife in that cad Porshinger's arms. I knocked him down with my stick—drove the end of it straight into his stomach—it is an old fencing trick, you know, Pendleton. When he got up I gave him another in the same place. It put him out. Then I went on the hunt of Stephanie—to know how she's going to meet the slander. It can't be the truth—at least, not the *way* he told it—Porshinger *must* have used violence. Didn't he?" he demanded.

"He did," Stephanie answered instantly. "He kissed me by force."

"I knew it!—I knew it!" Lorraine cried. "Well, I'll fix him—Porshinger, I mean. There is only one way to handle such as he—I'll prosecute him."

"You will what!" Stephanie exclaimed.

"I'll prosecute him—for assault and battery on

my wife. I'll show the dirty scoundrel something he wasn't looking for."

"You're wild, Lorraine!" interposed Pendleton quietly. "You won't help Stephanie by any such proceeding—making her testify in a magistrate's office and then in court before a gaping crowd—subjecting her to all the shame of publicity. Why don't you—" he leaned a bit forward and spoke persuasively, "why don't you try the end of your cane on Porshinger also?—It would be a lot more satisfaction to you—and so much quicker."

"It wouldn't accomplish the same result—it wouldn't put him in jail," Lorraine objected.

"It will put him in a hospital if you thrust hard enough," said Pendleton. "That ought to satisfy you."

"And put me in jail, if he prosecute."

"He will not prosecute, never fear."

Lorraine shook his head.

"It won't do!" he declared. "Stephanie has nothing to lose and everything to gain by my prosecuting him. The tale is going—what Dolittle knows will be public property in a day. The way to meet it is to have Porshinger arrested at once. Show that Stephanie is not afraid to face the issue. If she remain quiet under the story she tacitly admits its truth."

"But my dear Lorraine,"—Pendleton began.

"I'm not to be deterred, Montague—I didn't protect my wife from Amherst, but I will protect her this time." He arose. "You'll hear of Porshinger's

arrest before night.—It will take him a little by surprise, I imagine," he flung over his shoulder as he strode away.

Pendleton sprang up and overtook him.

"Look here, Lorraine!" he said, curtly. "Don't be a fool—you think that Porshinger will bear the brunt of this, but you're grievously in error—it will be Stephanie who catches all the recoil. Be sensible," he urged, his hands itching to shake Lorraine. "Think of the defence that Porshinger will make if he is disposed to fight—and if you *arrest* him he is sure to fight—that is the cad in him."

"What will he say?" Lorraine demanded.

"That what he did was with Stephanie's permission."

Lorraine laughed shortly. "Just so—and a jury won't hesitate long when it's a question of veracity between a pretty woman and a mere man. Silence might be the wiser course, *if no one knew*, but that is not the case—everyone knows it now, or will by night. You know Dolittle quite as well as I—don't *you* believe Stephanie?" he suddenly demanded.

"Of course I believe her," Pendleton answered impatiently. "She told me about Porshinger's conduct just before you came up, and we were discussing what to do——"

"But you didn't know that it had been overseen?" Lorraine interrupted.

"No—we——"

"Exactly!—And Dolittle's story puts another aspect on it. We've got to fight, and fight at once."

He signalled his motor with his stick, and it rolled up to the doorway. "I'll telephone you as soon as the warrant is issued," he said, and flashed away.

Pendleton looked thoughtfully after the receding car, then he come slowly back to his place.

"I don't know that the fool isn't right," he muttered.—"But why the devil didn't he act as promptly in the Amherst affair? . . . I couldn't stop him," he said, in answer to Stephanie's inquiring look. "He has gone to have Porshinger arrested."

"It doesn't much signify!" Stephanie shrugged. "Since Billy Dolittle saw it, the tale will be spread broadcast. He doesn't like me, you know, so that will be an additional animus—and Harry's stick didn't make him feel any the more lenient!" She laughed shortly. "I think I should like to have seen those thrusts—they're about all the satisfaction I can get out of the miserable affair. However, I'm pretty well hardened by this time—one more nasty story won't matter."

"And it all comes back to me," said Gladys.—"If I had not invited Porshinger to Criss-Cross, this wouldn't have happened."

"Nonsense!" Stephanie interrupted—"you're not to blame."

"No—*I'm* the guilty party," interrupted Pendleton. "I started the trouble when I had the dispute with Porshinger over the cut of his coat."

"But you wouldn't have had that dispute if Porshinger hadn't spoken slightingly of Stephanie," Gladys remarked.

"And Porshinger would not have had occasion to speak slightingly of me if I hadn't gone off with Amherst," Stephanie concluded. "So the primary guilt is mine—together with the further humiliation of having misjudged Porshinger. On the whole, I've succeeded in making about as complete a muddle of things as can well be imagined."

"I confess that I'm puzzled what to do," Pendleton reflected—"whether to block Lorraine or to let him go on—and we must act quickly if we're to block him. It resolves itself, of course, into which will occasion the less talk—and I'm free to admit I don't know. It looks to me like a case of 'you'll be damned if you do and you'll be damned if you don't.' What do you think, Gladys?"

"I think there isn't much choice. We're in a split stick. One way we face Porshinger's story and meet it with a passive denial, the other way we take the bull by the horns—that is, Lorraine forces us to—and tell the truth in court. As there can't be any question of blackmail, the latter *may* be the better—it has the merit of sincerity, of faith in the facts. On the whole, I think that it will damn less than the passive denial of Dolittle's story."

"I agree with Gladys:—we haven't much choice in the matter," remarked Stephanie hopelessly. "Lorraine is forcing the issue.—We simply have to meet it. I'm smirched anyway, but I shall be smirched less, it seems to me, by assuming the offensive."

XVIII

THE TRUTH BY PERSUASION

Just then Porshinger drove up in his car. The hour was early and the east piazza was as yet occupied only by Mrs. Lorraine, Miss Chamberlain and Pendleton. He sighted them at once—stood a moment as though undecided, then came slowly toward them.

"Can it be possible he will dare to join us!" Gladys exclaimed.

"Anything is possible with *him*," Stephanie answered contemptuously—and turned her back.

"Surely he won't have the effrontery!" Gladys insisted and looked away.

"I can't think that even *he* is cad enough for that," Pendleton remarked, busying himself with his cigarette.

That no one glanced up at Porshinger's approach did not faze him an instant. It was one of the secrets of his success in life that, having come to a decision, he always saw it through. He knew his own mind—which is more than the average man does.

"How-de-do, everybody!" he greeted. "May I sit down?" suiting the action to the word. "Miss Chamberlain, I salute you! also Mrs. Lorraine—and Mr. Pendleton. Bully day for golf—what do you say to a foursome?"

Stephanie arose, looked straight at Porshinger

with a deliberately ignoring stare, and turned to Miss Chamberlain.

"Will you come into the house with me, Gladys?" she asked. "Excuse me, Montague, please."

Pendleton had instantly found his feet—Porshinger was a trifle slower. Gladys bowed perfunctorily to the latter, and followed Stephanie. Pendleton resumed his seat and slowly lit another cigarette.

Porshinger laughed, a chuckling sort of laugh.

"I'm squelched, did you notice it?" he remarked.

"I noticed the intention, but not the desired result," Pendleton answered very coldly.

Porshinger's small eyes flashed a keen look at him—had Stephanie been telling them the truth—or only part of it? He had felt certain she would tell nothing—simply let it be inferred that they had had a disagreement; but there was something in the atmosphere that suggested——

"A slight disagreement last night at the Croydens' over a trifling matter," he laughed easily. "It's funny how a woman can make a man pay up for a little thing. You might imagine from the way she acted that I had done Mrs. Lorraine a grievous wrong."

Pendleton smoked and was silent.

In truth, he could not quite determine just how to meet the matter, knowing the facts and of Lorraine's contemplated action—whether to show he was aware of anything more than the actual incident of the moment, or to tell Porshinger his opinion of him. The latter, however, would entail the possibility of

violence if Porshinger elected to become offensive in his statements as to Stephanie. He *wanted* to smash Porshinger's face into a nothingness—yet that would be only a temporary personal satisfaction, and would complicate the matter still more without accomplishing anything.

Porshinger, on his part, had sunk his desire for vengeance into his desire for Stephanie. He could not understand a woman with her flagrant past except on one hypothesis—and he was willing to forget Pendleton's recent attack if he could supplant him in her affections. He had no possible doubt that Pendleton had taken Amherst's place—and he aimed to displace Pendleton. That a woman could make one bad step and then right herself beyond even the possibility of making another was, to his mind, utterly absurd. And the last few weeks had but confirmed him—she was playing him, to be sure, but coming closer every day, until he had only to put out his hand and take her. He had put out his hand last night at Croydens', but something had gone wrong. He had been a trifle premature—possibly because he did not quite understand these society women's ways. However, it was only a question of a little time. He would pluck the fruit eventually, of that he had no doubt. Stephanie was not really angry—only piqued at his awkwardness and want of appreciation of the proper situation. He would show her that he did not mind a temporary rebuff, would, in fact, disregard it entirely. If she was inclined to punish him a trifle, she should have her way. Money was king in the end

—and money would win. Her present conduct—this leaving him without a word, but with an ignoring look, was somewhat disconcerting and altogether unexpected. However, he assumed it was simply another exhibition of a society woman's seeming reluctance to yield, and the desire to make her conquest worth while. Yes, it *was* a trifle disconcerting. He was at a loss what to say, because he did not know how much, if anything, Stephanie had told of their quarrel.

He glanced covertly at Pendleton—Pendleton was smoking and looking dreamily up at the sky.

"My idea of a foursome didn't seem to take well with the ladies," he adventured.

"No, didn't seem to," Pendleton answered dryly.

"Do you think Mrs. Lorraine and Miss Chamberlain are coming back?"

Pendleton's patience was fast slipping its moorings.

"Judging from Mrs. Lorraine's manner, I should say *she* was not——so long as you are here," he replied.

Porshinger refused to take offence.

"I thought so myself!" he chuckled. "Have a drink, Pendleton?"

"No, thank you!" Pendleton declined sharply.

"Do you mind if I have one?"

"Not in the least."

"Do you mind if I stay here?"

Pendleton blew smoke rings and made no reply.

"From which I might infer—a number of things," Porshinger laughed. "But I won't. I had one

quarrel with a pretty woman over nothing last evening; I'm not going to have another quarrel with a good fellow this afternoon."

It was evident to Pendleton that Porshinger never suspected that Stephanie had told more than the simple fact of their quarrel, or else he was trying to draw him out so as to know what story he had to meet and overcome.

Just then Dolittle's voice came around the corner.

"Have you heard the latest scandal?" it enquired.

"No—what is it?" said another voice, which Pendleton recognized as Emerson's.

There was a moving of chairs and the two men sat down.

Pendleton took a long draw on his cigarette. He saw what was coming. Porshinger, however, did not see, and like the majority of his class, he craned his ears to overhear.

"It's pretty hot stuff!" laughed Dolittle. "Were you at the Croydens' last night?"

Pendleton glanced at Porshinger. The latter's face was suddenly creased by a frown.

"No—but Marcia was," Emerson answered, with the parvenu parent's pride in the daughter who has been included.

"She didn't tell you, I fancy?"

"I've not seen her.— She takes her breakfast in bed, you know."

"No—I didn't know," said Dolittle airily—then hastened to add:—"but most women do so, I understand."

"I don't know about most women," Emerson returned bluntly.

"Of course, you don't," Dolittle interjected pleasantly. "An old married man isn't supposed to know about such things. Hey!" and he laughed. "But to return—have you ever been in Croyden's country-house? It's down the valley."

"Sure, I have," said Emerson.

"Then you know how spacious it is, particularly the conservatory, and how the lights are arranged so that you seem to see all about you but you don't—the palms and the other big plants are concealers."

Porshinger stirred uneasily and whipped a glance at Pendleton—who had gone back to surveying the clouds and pushing smoke rings toward them.

"Yes," said Emerson; "I remember the conservatory perfectly. It's a beautiful room, a beautiful room!"

"Well be that as it may," Dolittle went on: "it was just before the Cotillon, and I was in the conservatory with—never mind her name—when Stephanie Lorraine came in with the fellow Porshinger——"

Porshinger half arose; then sank back and his eyes sought Pendleton—who was still occupied with the clouds and the smoke and his reverie.

"It's amazing how such an infernal bounder can get intimate with a woman like Mrs. Lorraine, even if he has more money than brains—and even if she has a bit unsavory past," Dolittle continued. "There are plenty in her own circle who have sufficient money to

occupy her attention. However, as I was saying, she and Porshinger entered and took a sheltered little nook, which apparently was concealed by the verdure——"

"Where were you?" asked Emerson.

"I was just a little way off, and could see through the leaves. Presently I happened to glance over and saw—what do you think I saw?"

"Give it up," said matter-of-fact Emerson.

"I saw—Mrs. Lorraine in Porshinger's arms!"

"You don't say!" exclaimed Emerson.

"Yes—and he was kissing her well, I can tell you."

"Hum!" reflected Emerson. "Did your—companion see it, too?"

"Sure, she did."

And Pendleton knew from his tones that Dolittle lied.

"Hum!" muttered Emerson again. "Is she discreet?"

"Do you mean, will she tell? Certainly she'll tell. Do you fancy a woman would let such an opportunity slip?"

"Or some men either!" Emerson remarked quietly.

"What do you intend to imply by that?" Dolittle bristled.

"It's not particularly hard to understand," the other answered.

"You mean you question *my* telling it?"

"I think it would have been kinder to Mrs. Lor-

raine if you had cautioned your companion not to tell—and followed your advice yourself."

"Well, I'm damned!" Dolittle sneered. "Learning propriety from a bar-tender."

"It doesn't make a heap of difference where you learn it, so long as you do learn it," said Emerson good-naturedly. "The only trouble with you is you never can learn it—you're too all-fired conceited and satisfied with yourself, my young friend."

Pendleton came suddenly to life.

"Do you hear what they are saying, Porshinger?" he demanded curtly.

His tone angered Porshinger, who had been at loss what he should do.

"Your conversation wasn't likely to drown it!" he retorted.

"And do you propose to sit calmly by and hear a woman maligned, with *you* named as the guilty party?"

"What if she wasn't maligned?" sneered Porshinger.—"What if it's true?"

"You miserable cur!" said Pendleton.

"Oh, you needn't think that you're the only one!" Porshinger laughed.

The next instant, Pendleton had him by the throat —then he released him and flung him in the chair.

"You're too contemptible for a man to touch, even in fight," said he.

It was no use for Porshinger to struggle physically against Pendleton, and he was well aware of it, one experience had already proved it beyond the pos-

sibility of doubt. So he sat back and carefully straightened his tie.

"The Board of Governors shall have a report of this affair," said he. "I overlooked your previous assault; but you'll have to pardon me if I decline to overlook this one."

"Report and be damned!" Pendleton exclaimed. "I'll be delighted if you do."

"And meanwhile, there are other ways of reaching you, my friend," Porshinger added. "I've already reached you through the lady we both admire, so you may have my leavings if you wish them. They're not so bad—as you doubtless can vouch for."

Again Pendleton sprang forward; Porshinger instantly cringed deeper into his chair.

With his cane raised to strike, Pendleton recovered himself.

"You are not worth even a broken stick," he declared—and turned away.

The noise of the scuffle had distracted Dolittle and Emerson from their own quarrel, and they had come around the corner and were staring in amazement at the other two.

"I'll break you, you snob," Porshinger sputtered. "I'll take every dollar you have, if it costs me a million to do it."

Pendleton shrugged his shoulders indifferently and continued straight over to the other two men.

"Mr. Emerson," he said, "I want to compliment you on what you have said to this cad Dolittle. Yours was the conduct of a gentleman." Then he turned to

Dolittle. "As for you, you miserable retailer of scurrilous gossip, I'm going to give you an opportunity to finish your tale."

His right hand shot out and seized Dolittle by the top of the waistcoat; at the same time his left hand grasped the other's left wrist. In a twinkle Dolittle's arm lay extended palm upwards across Pendleton's right arm, and Pendleton was standing close beside him.

It was all done in an instant—and before Dolittle realized what was happening he was absolutely helpless. Pendleton had but to press down and the arm would snap like a pipe-stem.

Dolittle's first struggle was also his last. His right arm was free, and with it he swung heavily at Pendleton's head—only to be lifted off his feet by a slight downward pressure on his left wrist. The pain was so excruciating he cried out.—The blow was wasted on the air.

"It's no use, Dolittle," said Pendleton. "You can't touch me and you can't break my hold—though I can break your arm as readily as I can break a commandment—and what is more, I'll do it unless you finish your tale!"

"It was finished," Dolittle answered, balanced uncomfortably on one foot and perfectly helpless.

"Not at all!" said Pendleton easily. "You have forgotten the most important part—please listen, Mr. Emerson—the most important part, I say. Let me remind you what it is."

"It isn't anything, I tell you!" Dolittle exclaimed.

"Think again!" Pendleton admonished, accompanied by the faintest pressure—which instantly brought a spasm of pain to the other's face. "You will, I'm sure.—Now this is what you omitted to relate. You told Mr. Emerson that you saw Mrs. Lorraine being kissed by Porshinger last evening in the Croyden conservatory, but you forgot to add that he kissed her by force and despite her struggles. —Repeat it, please."

Dolittle was sullenly silent.

"Do you hear?" asked Pendleton, beginning to apply the pressure.

Dolittle stood the agony for an instant—then he wilted.

"I neglected to add, Mr. Emerson," he gasped, "that Porshinger kissed Mrs. Lorraine by force and despite her struggles."

"I thought you could be depended upon to tell the whole truth," Pendleton remarked, easing up a trifle on his grip so that the other stood at ease.

"Then if you want the whole truth, why was it that the lady went back to the ballroom *with* Porshinger?" Dolittle sneered.

"I'm coming to that," said Pendleton, tightening his hold again. "Repeat, please—and immediately Mrs. Lorraine was free and out of Porshinger's grasp, she ordered him to take her back to the ballroom, so as to avoid the comment that might be provoked by her returning alone."

With a scowl of fury, Dolittle repeated the words.

"Thank you," said Pendleton. "And one thing

more—if I hear of your telling this story any other way than with these truthful additions—and if you don't amend, before this day is over, the tales you've already told, I shall cane you within an inch of your life—understand. I don't think the woman with you saw—but if she did, better warn her also—though I don't doubt, if she did see it, she will tell the truth. Now, go!"—and he flung him away in contempt.

"You damn bully!" Dolittle choked.

"As you wish!" Pendleton laughed. "I've found my muscular development of much use for such abominations as you.—Mr. Emerson, will you do me the honor of joining me in a drink?"

"That I will, sir!" exclaimed Emerson. "With pleasure, sir, with pleasure! Where shall it be, Mr. Pendleton?"

"Here, if it please you. This is preferable to indoors on such a fine day." He touched a bell. "Take Mr. Emerson's order," he said to the boy.

"My dear sir, it was great—great!" Emerson exploded. "You deserve a vote of thanks from every man who has a wife or daughter. You're a credit, sir, a credit to your class and to the Club—by God, sir, you are!"

"It was a difficult situation to handle," said Pendleton—"and I'm not so sure I handled it properly; however, it was the best I could think of on the spur of the moment. Moreover, it was the simple truth that I forced Dolittle to tell."

"I haven't a doubt of it," Emerson declared. "And what is more, Dolittle knows that it is the truth,

if he actually didn't see it. He's a pup, sure enough."

"You slander the pup, Mr. Emerson!" smiled Pendleton.

"I do, indeed. I beg the pup's pardon. He's a—what is he?"

"He is the same as Porshinger—an abomination."

"That expresses it exactly—an abomination," Emerson agreed. He glanced quietly around. "He has joined Porshinger—they are scheming trouble for you, I'm afraid."

Pendleton smiled indifferently, and lit a cigarette.

"I wish I had your nerve," said Emerson admiringly. "To flout both Porshinger and Dolittle—make them both your vindictive enemies, and not to seem to care a damn. That's what you fellows call *noblesse oblige*, isn't it?"

"Most people would call it rank idiocy, I fear!" Pendleton laughed.

"Then me for the rank idiots. Here's to more of them, Mr. Pendleton, here's to more of them!" He put down his glass. "Who's this burning up the speed regulations? Gee! he certainly is hitting it up some."

"It looks like Mr. Lorraine's machine," Pendleton replied.

The car dashed up and made a spectacular stop—to the injury of the tires and the machinery—and Lorraine jumped out, followed by a man in a shabby uniform with a shield on the front of his waistcoat.

"What's this?" said Emerson—"a plain clothes

man in disguise—or," as Lorraine and the man drew near, " a constable in regalia? "

Pendleton smiled slightly but did not reply.

Lorraine, his eyes on Porshinger, made his way directly across to him—giving Pendleton a preoccupied nod as he passed.

" There is Porshinger—the man with his back to the railing!" said Lorraine. " Serve your warrant, Officer Burke."

XIX

THE ARREST

THE two were near enough for Porshinger to hear what Lorraine said, and his eyes suddenly narrowed like a snake's and took on a look as venomous.

"Is this Mr. Porshinger—Charles J. Porshinger?" the constable inquired, with an important air, that was at the same time slightly apologetic.

"Yes!" said Porshinger. The word was fairly bitten off.

"I've a warrant here for you, sir," the constable continued.

"For me!" Porshinger exclaimed. "What do you mean, fellow—do you know who I am?"

"It don't make no difference to me who you are, sir. I'm doin' my duty, in the name of the law, and I'm arrestin' you because I've a warrant here what orders it."

"Arresting me for what?" Porshinger demanded.

"For assault and battery."

"At whose instance?"

Burke passed the warrant across.

"This gentleman here is the prosecutor, I believe," he said. "Now come with me and see the magistrate. He'll fix the amount of bail."

Porshinger took the warrant and read it.

"So!" he sneered. "What do you think to gain by this business, Lorraine?"

Lorraine ignored him.

"The prisoner is in your hands, constable," he remarked. "I suggest you would better take him along—the magistrate is waiting. If he doesn't want to enter bail, take him to jail."

"Take me to jail!—me to jail!" cried Porshinger.

"That's where I'll have to take you unless you enter bail, or arrange with the magistrate. I've got nothin' to do but to take you, Mr. Porshinger," said Burke firmly.

"Won't you take my word that I'll appear there before six o'clock and enter bail?" Porshinger demanded.

"I'll take nothin' but you, sir. I must obey my warrant, and you've got to obey it too."

"Do you know who I am?" said Porshinger again.

"I know who you are, all right, but that don't make no difference to me, as I said before. I don't know nothin' about the merits of the case; whether you're guilty or innocent is none of my business. I'm executin' my warrant, and I'm a goin' to do it—so come along."

"I suppose you'll at least let me telephone to my lawyer?" said Porshinger.

"Sure, sir; if you do it at once, with me along with you."

"Oh, certainly. I wouldn't lose the pleasure of your company!" mocked Porshinger. "And then you'll let me ride with you in my car to the magistrate's office?"

"No, I won't," Burke smiled. "We'll go in Mr.

Lorraine's car. You might forget to tell your buzz man where to stop."

"My dear officer, do you know you're piling up a lot of trouble for yourself in the future?"

"I don't know nothin' at present but my warrant, Mr. Porshinger—so come along and do your telephonin', and then let's be off. It's four o'clock now, and if the magistrate's office is closed, it's you to the jail in default of bail—understand?"

"What!" cried Porshinger.

"That's it," replied Burke.

"Then let us be going, by all means," said Porshinger sourly. He crossed to where Lorraine was sitting. "It's a new rôle for you, Mr. Complaisant Husband—to defend your wife!" he sneered. "You would better have stirred yourself after Amherst—it might have been to more purpose. Now—you're brave enough to drag her name through the mire of a court—and wash all your dirty linen, including hers. I don't want to tell all I know regarding Mrs. Lorraine, but I'll tell enough to show that there was no *assault.* I *did* kiss her—a number of times. She's a very kissable lady—but it wasn't by force. *Oh, no!*"

Lorraine gripped his chair arms until his knuckles were white, but he controlled himself. Then he arose.

"It was because I knew you were such a poltroon that I prosecuted you rather than horse-whipped you," he replied; "and I am careful to abstain from physical violence. You would be only too ready to prosecute me, and so muddy the water. You're too despicable,

Porshinger, even to talk to," and he turned his back and walked away.

"You might as well start another prosecution, since you seem to be strong on them at present," Porshinger went on. "Why don't you prosecute the new Amherst?" with a look at Pendleton.

"The new Amherst!" cried Lorraine, whirling around—"The new Amherst!—What do you mean?"

"You poor, blind cuckold!" was the mocking retort. "You've horns growing all over you. You never see anything until it is too late. You're an easy mark, sure enough. Oh, it isn't I—I'm not in the Amherst class, thank God!—but your dear friend Pendleton *is*," raising his voice so that Pendleton could hear.

A contemptuously amused look came over Lorraine's face, and he broke into a derisive laugh.

"I'm obliged for the information!" he replied.

"No doubt you are. If you doubt it, you might ask what your wife and Pendleton were doing on the Criss-Cross piazza, one night about five weeks ago. That was what first put me wise as to Mrs. Lorraine's —possibilities—also capabilities."

"You damn coward!" cried Lorraine, springing toward the other.—Then he stopped. "No—you don't lure me to offer you violence," he said.

"Time's passing, Mr. Porshinger," said Burke's voice behind him. "If the magistrate's gone, don't blame me."

"Ah! thank you for reminding me," Porshinger answered. "Come, we'll go to the telephone," and

with a sneering smile at Lorraine, and another at Pendleton as he passed him, he went into the Clubhouse—Burke following just behind.

Porshinger got Dalton, his personal counsel, on the wire. He was just leaving for the day, he remarked when he recognized Porshinger's voice.

"I wish you would send some one around to Magistrate Swinton's office at once," Porshinger directed. "I've been arrested—yes, that's what I said—I've been arrested for assault and battery, and the officer is going to lock me up if I haven't bail ready. I'm out at the Otranto Club now—but we're coming right in, and I'll meet your man there. You telephone the magistrate we're coming, will you?—What?—Yes, they know who I am, but it don't influence the fellow with the warrant—he says he has to take me—which is correct, I reckon. . . . Yes, some one will suffer, you're damn right! . . . What is it about?—the assault?—I'll tell you when I see you. Some people have got themselves into a hell of a mess. . . . Yes. . . . Very well. Good-bye.—Now, my man, I'm at your service."

Side by side they crossed the piazza and entered Lorraine's car.

"Tell my machine to follow," said Porshinger, to the servant who opened the door.

During the drive, Porshinger did not speak, and Burke was discreetly quiet. When they drew up at the magistrate's office, Burke hopped out and offered his hand to the other, who ignored it. Lorraine's car immediately drove off, and Porshinger's took its place.

"Ah! Dalton, you came yourself, did you? I'm glad to see you," said Porshinger. "There wasn't any need, I suppose, one of your young men would have been able to handle this matter."

"I thought it best to come myself," Dalton replied. "No trouble, I assure you—just simply a case of bail. Everything is arranged. All you have to do is to sign your name. Then we'll waive a hearing, and let the matter come up in court, if you want it to come up," with a sharp glance at his client's face. "Otherwise, we'll have the district attorney's office pigeon-hole it."

"I'm not sure what I want," said Porshinger.

"Well we'll waive the hearing anyway, and you can take your time to consider."

"I'm not sure I want it waived," Porshinger answered. "I'm inclined to fight."

"Don't do it before the magistrate," the lawyer advised. "He is sure to hold you, and it will only make the matter more prominent. You're playing into Lorraine's hands by doing it. For some reason, he seems to want the facts aired. So it's your policy to suppress them—no matter if you're as innocent as tomorrow. A *woman* is involved—and you must submit to a few adverse inferences for the general good of your cause. Society will forgive much in such a case, *if you're quiet*—it will never forgive you if you make a fight."

"That is your advice?"

"On general principles, yes," Dalton replied.

"There is force in your argument," Porshinger admitted. "However, I don't know—let the magistrate fix the hearing—we can waive it any time before, I suppose?"

"You will have to come around here and renew your bail," said Dalton.

"Why is that?"

"If you waive the hearing you give bail for court; if you don't waive the hearing your bail will be to appear before the magistrate at a time fixed."

"Hell!" exclaimed Porshinger, "I don't want to come here again, if I concluded *not* to go to a hearing.—Well, waive the hearing. We can give the Lorraines all they want in court—and something more."

They entered the rear office where the magistrate was awaiting them. Porshinger was introduced, he waived the hearing; the bail was quickly arranged—one thousand dollars for appearance at the next term of court; Dalton and he signed it; and they went out.

"A lawyer isn't supposed to go bail, but I fixed it up with the squire," Dalton remarked. "It's a mere form in your case—and I thought it well not to mention the matter to anyone. Moreover, I hadn't time to get another bondsman. I knew you didn't care to be kept waiting."

Porshinger nodded.

"Have the Lorraines become reconciled?" Dalton inquired.

"Lorraine has become reconciled, the ninny—but Mrs. Lorraine hasn't, I hear. Problem, isn't it?"

"Social problem!" laughed the lawyer.—"The unforgiving offender."

Porshinger smiled. "It may be that way—I can't quite comprehend it, however. Why should Lorraine prosecute me if his wife's not reconciled to him?—and she plainly isn't, or wasn't last evening."

"Which nevertheless is not material to the issue," Dalton replied. "It is: did you commit an assault and battery on Mrs. Lorraine last night?"

"I kissed her in the Croyden conservatory," said Porshinger bluntly.

"Hum—did she know it—I mean, was the kissing with her consent?"

"Sure it was," he lied.

"But she told?"

"No—we were overseen by Dolittle—and he told."

"Most unfortunate!" smiled Dalton. "It's perfectly plain now. To defend herself, Mrs. Lorraine tells Lorraine that you kissed her by force—and Lorraine rushes off and prosecutes you. It's a pretty mess. Everybody knows it, and everybody will be talking, and everyone concerned will be more or less smudged. I'm sorry for you, Porshinger."

"Why sorry?" Porshinger demanded. "Since when has it become a crime to kiss a pretty woman?"

"It hasn't. Your crime wasn't in kissing her but in kissing her so bunglingly as to be overseen. Society never quite forgives one, particularly a new-comer, that sort of clumsiness. It is always remembered against him."

"Not if he can buy forgetfulness," said Porshinger easily.

Dalton's glance flashed an instant over the other's face.

"Perhaps—it's sometimes done, though not often. You may be an exception, Porshinger. I trust so."

"You can do anything if you're willing to pay for it—and keep out of jail," was the complacent answer. "I'll supply the money; it will be up to you to keep me out of jail—understand?"

XX

THE TURN OF THINGS

For a while after Porshinger and the constable had departed, Lorraine sat thinking. Those last words of Porshinger's, which he had seemed to laugh to scorn, none the less bred suspicion.

"*You might ask what she and Pendleton were doing on the Criss-Cross piazza, one night about five weeks ago.*"

What did it mean? There must be some basis for the insinuation—some fact that was suspicious on its face. He did not want to mistrust Pendleton; he would *not* mistrust him; he would frankly tell him what Porshinger had said and accept his explanation or denial. Pendleton was fond of Stephanie—had been fond of her before the marriage—had stood by her nobly since her return. It was not credible. It was a scheme of that miserable brute to embroil him with Stephanie's best friend.—Yet he would like to have Pendleton's denial. He would feel better—yes, decidedly better. There would be a satisfaction in having the denial—in hearing it.

He got up and crossed over to where Pendleton and Emerson were sitting. The latter remained a few moments, then excused himself, on the plea of having to dress for golf, and went off to the locker-rooms.

Both Lorraine and Pendleton were silent—the former staring at the floor, the latter gazing through his

cigarette smoke out on the links, which were beginning to fill with players.

"Well—it's done!" said Lorraine presently.

"Not exactly," Pendleton replied. "I should say it's only begun."

"The beginning is done, at any rate," Lorraine returned.

"It's easy to start something, but it's quite another thing to finish it."

"No doubt about that—the difficulty with me hitherto has been that I never started. Now——"

"Now it is a question whether it wouldn't be better if you *hadn't* started."

"Do you think so?" demanded Lorraine.

"Candidly, I don't know what to think," said Pendleton. "It's such a miserable mess all through. We want to do the best for Stephanie, but I admit *I'm* not competent to judge what the best is under the circumstances. However, the attack has been made—it only remains now to fight it out on your plan. Have you any plan, Lorraine?"

"Plan!" answered Lorraine vaguely. "No—I've no plan—other than to punish Porshinger for his dirty conduct toward Stephanie, and to meet Dolittle's nasty tale with the truth."

"Very good!" nodded Pendleton, "but that is the conclusion, not the plan. What if Porshinger fights—and is supported by Dolittle? What if he says that Stephanie was willing and that he did not use force?"

"I'll take Stephanie's word in preference to a

thousand Porshingers and Dolittles!" Lorraine declared.

"And so will I—but will a jury? You have not consulted counsel, I suppose?"

"No—I've not consulted anyone. I acted solely on my own responsibility because I was satisfied it was right."

"And what is more important to Stephanie—will the public accept her word and believe it?" Pendleton reflected.

"Certainly it will. I haven't a bit of doubt of it."

Pendleton shrugged his shoulders.

"I wish I had your assurance," he replied. "There is only one thing about it that isn't doubtful, to my mind."

"What is that?" Lorraine demanded impatiently.

"That Stephanie will be damned utterly unless her story is accepted."

"She is damned if Dolittle's story is accepted. This is the only means she has of clearing herself—to fight openly. Unless"—he paused and looked hard at Pendleton—"unless she will consent to a reconciliation and resume her place as my wife."

"I wish someone could persuade her of that," Pendleton answered instantly. "It is her best and wisest course. It would relieve the entire situation."

"You will tell her so?" Lorraine demanded eagerly.

"I *have* told her so—many times within the last few weeks. I told her so to-day."

"And she——?"

Pendleton shook his head.

"It doesn't seem to appeal to her, Lorraine."

"I will do the next best thing—I'll stand by her," he exclaimed. "If she won't have me for husband, she can't object to the moral and active support of the man who has the first right to render it. Indeed, if I am with her, if I instituted the fight, what has Society to say?"

"That is the proper attitude, Lorraine," Pendleton replied. "It will go far to sustain Stephanie's story."

"I'll do everything in my power to make amends for the past," Lorraine went on. "Maybe it will soften her a little toward me."

Pendleton said nothing.

"There is one thing I wanted to ask you, Pendleton," he went on, after a moment's pause. "I trust that you won't misunderstand—that you'll take it in the right way."

"Certainly, I'll take it in the right way," Pendleton answered heartily.

He knew what was coming and was ready to meet it. Porshinger had not raised his voice in vain; though what he had intended for a threat was a warning also.

"I want you to explain," said Lorraine, "what Porshinger meant when he said, just before he went off with the constable: 'I'm not in Amherst's class, but your dear friend Pendleton is—if you doubt it, you might ask him what your wife and he were doing on the Criss-Cross piazza, one night about five weeks

ago.'—Don't imagine that I believe the scoundrel's insinuation for an instant—that you and Stephanie were guilty of even the most trifling indiscretion. I trust you, Pendleton—you're not one to be swept away by passion or sentiment—and I think that Stephanie has had enough to steady her permanently. Yet what did he mean? Was it just thrown out for viciousness, or was there something happened at Criss-Cross which his vile brain distorted into vileness? Can you guess—can you imagine what basis in fact he could have?"

"My dear Lorraine, no basis in fact I can assure you," Pendleton answered very quietly. "I've been at Criss-Cross several times within the last five weeks when Stephanie was there. I was alone with her on the piazza repeatedly, by day and in the evening, but there wasn't a time when Gladys or any of the guests could not have overheard our conversation or seen our acts."

"God save me for a quibbler!" he thought. "A lie by inference and intended to deceive—though true enough in word—is none the less a lie. Yet for Stephanie's sake, I am remitted to it. The little woman was right—and I was a fool!"

Lorraine put out his hand; and Pendleton took it, feeling like a dog but smiling ingenuously.

"Woodside's place adjoins Criss-Cross and Porshinger visits him, you know; he was invited to the Chamberlains, one Sunday when we were there," Pendleton observed. "He might have seen me with Stephanie at that time; he might even have used a field-glass from Woodside's or say he did; and he might

have seen us sitting together and concocted a story to fit his purposes."

"More than likely concocted it while he was saying it!" Lorraine exclaimed. "He wanted to embroil me with you—split the opposition into fighting among themselves, when they should stand together. Well—it hasn't succeeded. Neverthless I thought it best that we should have it out at once, so as to have no misunderstanding hereafter."

"It was much the best way!" Pendleton agreed—"Much the best way. I thank you for giving me a chance to deny—and for accepting my denial."

"My dear Pendleton," Lorraine exclaimed, "you don't think I would have made that request of you at the Hospital—to watch over Stephanie—to protect her from herself—if I had doubted you or ever should doubt you?"

"I shouldn't suppose so!" Pendleton answered.

Then he switched the conversation—it was too acutely personal—he was writhing under it. He would much have preferred to tell Lorraine the truth—and stand shamed. But he might not on Stephanie's account.

"I think I'll go in and telephone Cameron about the case, and ask him to look after it," said Lorraine. "It needs a lawyer. It would have been wiser, I admit, if I had had a lawyer from the start."

"*Before* it started," amended Pendleton.

"Will you be here this evening?"

Pendleton nodded.

"Then I'll ask him to talk it over with you also.

I'm very tired. I think I'll go home presently, if you don't mind."

Pendleton wanted to take him by the shoulders and fling him into his car—anything to be rid of him.

"Not in the least," he replied—"I'll talk it over with Cameron."

Presently Lorraine returned.

"I've told Cameron everything," he said. "He will be here about six o'clock. I asked him to see you. I'll call you up to-morrow. Good by!"

After a moment, Pendleton arose and went into the house. Choosing a magazine at random from the table, he crossed to a retired corner of the big living-room and buried himself behind it—not to read, but to think.

It was a peculiarly difficult situation; arising from causes simple enough in themselves when taken separately, but extraordinarily complicated when considered together. Stephanie, Gladys, Lorraine, Amherst, Porshinger, Dolittle and himself—everyone a party acting independently, so to speak, yet in effect acting together to attain the present embarrassing condition. Naturally a woman was at the bottom of it—she always is in such matters—and she would be the one to suffer for all their foolishnesses and mistakes. Stephanie would be pilloried because Porshinger and Dolittle and he himself had acted the cad—one by nature, one because he was a malicious gossip, and one because he was a natural born damn fool. The last was quite the most to blame because he should and ought to have known better.

The more he pondered the situation, the more hopeless it became. Amherst was out of it now except as an original cause. Lorraine was only in it by right, and out of it on every other basis. Dolittle was in it by reason of his disposition to meddle in the affairs of others; but Porshinger and he were in it because they were guilty against Stephanie. Technically Lorraine had a perfect right to prosecute Porshinger—and Porshinger deserved to be prosecuted—but what of himself? Who was the more guilty of the two? He had betrayed an implied trust. It mattered not if Stephanie loved him—it mattered not that she had no reproaches for him; he was guilty none the less, and had only complicated the matter for her, for Porshinger had seen them—or at least he knew. And Stephanie, the innocent cause of it all—of his and Porshinger's audaciousness—was to be the real victim because of Dolittle's babbling tongue and Lorraine's misdirected energy. The whole thing, however, came back to Dolittle, so far as the present complication was concerned. If he had not seen—or had been blind though seeing—it would never have arisen.

However, none of these matters confronted them now. There was small profit in searching for causes, or for whom to blame. Their business was to meet a present condition in the best way possible—and there appeared to be no best. All were equally bad. The more he thought over it, the more hopeless it all was and the more futile every effort to save Stephanie. She was bound to be smirched, take it whatever way one would. If the prosecution was abandoned, then

Dolittle's story would be believed no matter how she treated Porshinger in the future. If the prosecution was persisted in, then Porshinger's story of the willing victim had to be met by Stephanie's story of violence—all the nasty details threshed out for an eager populace—with Stephanie the real defendant with all to lose and nothing to gain.—And if Porshinger dragged him into it, by telling what he saw on the Criss-Cross piazza, the verdict would scarcely be in doubt and the——

In disgust with himself, he sprang up and crossed the room to a distant window. It was a lovely prospect that lay before him—the fields, the trees, the close-cut fair-green of the course dotted with the players, all under a lazy afternoon sky—but he did not see it. He saw only the miserable situation into which he had put the woman he loved—and who loved him—and whom he was utterly unable to help save in one way: marriage. And she was married to another! whom she would have none of, but who was determined on a reconciliation. Even if he acknowledged the Criss-Cross affair to Lorraine, it would effect nothing for Stephanie's salvation. Lorraine might be moved to divorce her, and that very circumstance would establish Porshinger's defence and prove Dolittle's nasty story. Guilty of the one, she would be deemed guilty of the other. It was a dark prospect for her. Her rehabilitation, which had appeared so sure, had suddenly been wrapped in blackness——

"Is it so very absorbing—I mean the prospect?" said a low voice behind him.

He turned quickly, with something of a start, and met Stephanie's intimate little smile.

"I found it so," he replied, taking her hand.

She laughed softly—the beautifully modulated laugh that Pendleton loved, and that had rung in his ears for many years.

"You were not looking at the prospect, my friend —confess it," she said.

"I was not," he admitted.

"You were thinking of—me; of the trouble I have been—and am—and always shall be. Were you not, Montague?"

"No! I was not. I was trying to think of some way to help you out of your trouble."

"And wishing I had never—come back!"

"You know better than that!" he smiled.

"Because there isn't any way to help me out of the trouble," she went on. "I've got to take my punishment."

"You have already taken your punishment," he answered. "That which is in prospect is not due you."

"I have incurred it none the less," she said. "It is but the result of what has gone before. If I had not merited *that* punishment, I would not be threatened now. The one wouldn't have happened—and the other wouldn't matter."

"You mean?"

"That Porshinger would never have been in a position to take advantage of me—and that *you*——" she broke off with a fascinating smile.

"May I supply the rest?" he whispered.

"Do you think you can be trusted?" she asked.

"I'm afraid I can't be trusted for anything where you are concerned."

"Not even to defend?" she smiled.—"I'll trust you, Montague—for anything."

"You see how I've betrayed your trust."

"Nonsense! we were equally culpable—equally indiscreet. Now we are to be punished equally. You by your conscience, and I openly. Please think no more about it."

"If only you were free!" he exclaimed.

"Which I'm not—and haven't any prospect of being. Like all vacillating people, Lorraine has suddenly become possessed by a fixed idea, and right or wrong he will cling to it until he dies. Why couldn't it have been to divorce me, instead of to keep me? However, it is profitless to wonder why, when to wonder won't make it any different." She gave a little gesture of despair. "Do you think Lorraine will actually have Porshinger arrested—or is it only an evanescent fancy?"

"He *has had* him arrested—here. Within half an hour of his departure, he was back with an officer and a warrant—and the officer has taken Porshinger to the magistrate's."

"It's just as well, I suppose," she reflected. "We can have everything out in court at once, and not have it in detachments forever. The more I think of it, the better I like Lorraine's course—if I must fight; and, as you have said, we can't avoid a fight if I am to

have a shred of reputation left. The Amherst affair well nigh damned me—only you and Gladys and a few others, and my mother's position, enabled me to regain a little of what I had lost—caused Society to suspend its final judgment on me. Now if I'm guilty of this Porshinger matter, it will be taken to show such a natural aptitude to go wrong—such a disposition for the unmentionable that there is only one course open to me: to go away and never return. So far as the town is concerned, I might just as well be dead—better, indeed."

He nodded gravely. He, too, knew that it was as she had said. Even Lorraine's attitude in the matter would have no effect. Society would have none of her—she would have condemned herself.

"You are not going to lose," he encouraged. "It is not a pleasant alternative to be sure, but it is the only one possible under the circumstances, and we're going to carry it through. It may be a bit unpleasant while it lasts, but it will soon be over—and all the sympathy will be with *you*. Porshinger is such a contemptible cad that no one of right mind will doubt you for a moment."

"No one of right mind *should* doubt," she admitted—"but only the future will reveal whether my past hasn't overcome their right minds."

"Why don't you forget your past—it's past!" he exclaimed.

"As I think you have said to me many times, Montague!" she smiled, "and as you know is impossible."

"It is not just to yourself to remember what your friends have forgot."

"What my friends have *overlooked*, you mean—they can never forget."

"Then *you* overlook it," he said.

"I wish I could," she replied.

"You can. It's simply a rule of action."

"Don't you think I try to act the part?" she said sadly. "It's try, try, try all the time. I'm about worn out with trying."

"It succeeds, dear," he encouraged. "No one would ever know that you are not as calm and unconcerned as you appear to be. Even I would be deceived, if you yourself had not told me otherwise."

"I'm glad I've acted the part so well," she smiled. "I only hope I can keep it up to the end—if there is ever to be an end."

"It can always have a certain end, Stephanie," he whispered.

"Thank you, Montague; I'll not pretend that I don't understand—nor that I——" she broke off, and looked by him and out to the distant horizon. "It is no use for us to discuss the impossible," she said softly.

"It is going to be the probable," he declared.

"Then wait until it *is* the probable."

"And then it is going to be the *fact*."

She shook her head—but an adorable smile came into her soft blue eyes.

"You seem very sure, my friend," she whispered.

"I am very sure, dear," he replied. "Very sure, indeed."

"You must not call me dear," she reminded him.

"Dearest, then," he amended.

"Nor dearest, either."

"Darling!"

"Worse still."

"Sweetheart!"

"Not even sweetheart."

He sighed.—"You're very hard to please!"

"Do you think so?" she asked naïvely.

"In the matter of names, I mean."

"Appellations of friendship were better."

"But it isn't friendship!" he laughed.

"Not friendship?"

"Well, call it friendship, if *you* please. I'll call it something else."

"A riddle!" she exclaimed.

"To which the answer is found on the next page—shall we turn it?"

"Do you think it wise?" she asked—"wise to turn the new page before we have finished the old?"

"No, it is *not* wise," he answered slowly. "You are right, *Stephanie*. You see I call you simply Stephanie, but it is hard to have to read what doesn't interest me."

"If it is hard to have to *read*, what do you think it is to have to live it?" she asked.

"It must be hell!" he replied.

"It *is* hell," she admitted—"hell of my own making—that is what hurts."

"Don't let it hurt, Stephanie," he pleaded, taking her hand. "It will all come right very soon—very soon, I'm persuaded."

"By what?"

"By the natural turn of events—they can't go against you much longer."

"The only turn that would help me would be for Porshinger to die suddenly—and Lorraine to become reasonable and give me my freedom."

"If Porshinger were to die suddenly," he repeated thoughtfully. "Yes, that might clarify the matter very much. Unfortunately Porshinger isn't cultivating death these days—he has quit shooting wells, you know."

"And he hasn't any cause to shoot himself," she remarked.

"He has plenty of causes but he won't recognize them!" Pendleton smiled.

The Postlewaite carriage drove up with a flourish, and Mrs. Postlewaite descended with heavy dignity and becoming condescension. Her arrival was an event at the Club-house—only equalled by the arrival of the other Queen P; and she was fully aware of the fact.

The doorman and a couple of "buttons" danced out—and continued to dance during the royal progress inward—while a crowd of her satellites, who were on the piazza, rushed forward to meet her.

"It is very amusing—Mrs. Postlewaite's assumption of greatness," Pendleton remarked.

"Not half so amusing as Society's according it to her," Stephanie returned.

"Bluff and arrogance wins mostly."

"If one has the requisite manner and cool nerve to carry them off," she amended.

"I don't see anything wanting in the lady immediately in our fore!" Pendleton smiled. "Only in her case, she has been doing it so long it has become part of her life—she actually does it naturally and by arrogation of divine right. It must be pleasant to have such a comfortable feeling about one's self."

Mrs. Postlewaite, in her progress down the piazza, glanced casually in and saw them.—She paused, considered an instant; then facing around, and dismissing her attendants she came over to the window.

"Stephanie, dear!" she purred, in her most gracious tones, "will you come out a moment. I've something I want to tell you."

Stephanie, dear!

It was the evidence of the return of the royal favor—the piazza had heard it—the entire Club-house would know it in a moment—it would spread like the wind.

Even Stephanie's equanimity was startled into a calm surprise, which showed in her face and in her heightened color. And coming *now*—of all times!

"Certainly, Mrs. Postlewaite," Stephanie answered.

"And bring Montague along. I want him to hear it too," the *grande dame* went on.

"What does it mean?" Stephanie whispered, as she and Pendleton passed toward the door.

"You heard what she called you: 'Stephanie, dear'?"

"Yes!"

"Then there isn't much doubt."

"But at this juncture!" she marvelled.

"Mrs. Postlewaite knows the exigencies and the juncture too, never fear. The turn has come, sweeth—I mean, Stephanie."

She shot him a bewildering smile; the next moment they stood in "the presence."

"Stephanie, dear," began Mrs. Postlewaite, without any preliminary, "I have heard of Mr. Dolittle's nasty tale of what he saw last night in the Croyden conservatory; I have also heard of Harry's prompt prosecution of that unspeakable Porshinger, and I want to tell you that I and Mrs. Porterfield are ready to testify in your behalf. We were on the little balcony overhanging one side of the room; we saw Porshinger make the attempt, your indignant repulse, your seizure again, your freeing yourself, and then your making him take you back to the ball-room. The last was delightful! I saw it all, my dear—and I'm proud of Harry Lorraine, because he chose to believe your story rather than that horrid Dolittle's, and to prosecute Porshinger instead of a disgraceful use of physical violence."

"You're very kind, Mrs. Postlewaite," Stephanie replied—"very kind——"

"Not at all, my dear, not at all! We shall take particular care to tell it. It is fortunate we happened to see everything, and so can vouch for your story in the face of Dolittle's scandalous tale and Porshinger's lie—he will lie, of course. Now, if you don't

mind, we will let by-gones be by-gones—and start fresh." She laid her hand intimately on Stephanie's arm. "And we'll have tea together here to bind it—just we three. Will you, my dear?"

"Of course, I will, Mrs. Postlewaite!" Stephanie responded, with a happy little laugh. The Porshinger episode was over—the victory was theirs.

Just then, from somewhere downstairs, came a voice calling so loudly the whole piazza heard:—

"I say, fellows, do you know that Amherst is in town—got back this morning? I shouldn't be surprised if the damn scoundrel would actually have nerve enough to come up here and ask us all to take a drink!"

Pendleton deliberately leaned forward and took Stephanie's hand in his—and held it, with a reassuring pressure.

"As you were saying, Mrs. Postlewaite," he remarked, "I hear that the Croyden ball was a charming affair, though I was so unfortunate as to miss it."

XXI

OBSESSED

When tea was over Mrs. Postlewaite arose.

"Come around soon and see me, Stephanie!" she smiled, and with an intimately gracious nod, she resumed her progress down the piazza.

"Where is Gladys?" Pendleton asked.

"On the other side, playing Auction, I think; don't disturb her, Montague—and if you will call my car, I'll go home. I've had about enough excitement for one afternoon." She breathed a sigh of intense relief. "The last is very gratifying, isn't it, my friend?"

"Mrs. Postlewaite and Mrs. Porterfield, of all others!" exclaimed Pendleton. "The best witnesses you could possibly have. It's too lucky for words! Your rehabilitation is effected and Porshinger is undone. He will be cut by everyone and expelled from the Clubs. It is a social Waterloo for him."

"But it doesn't relieve *you* of his revenge," she objected. "It will make him all the more determined to square off."

"Don't let that bother you, dear—I mean, Stephanie!" he laughed. "You're free of him—he won't try his dirty tricks on you—and I'm a man, and it doesn't matter. I can meet him half way and then some. In fact, I'm hoping he will be kind enough to give me the opportunity."

"I'm afraid for you, Montague—indeed I'm afraid!" she repeated.

"Nonsense, little woman. Don't you worry about me—I tell you there is no need. *You're* out of it now.—I admit I *was* mightily concerned for you; that is why I didn't favor Gladys' and your scheme to placate him: because it involved you. He could have made it most unpleasant—as he did—and as he didn't, thanks to Mrs. Postlewaite."

He put her in her car, with the courteous deference he always had for a woman—were she but a beggar who accosted him on the street—and which was always just a shade more courteous and more deferential to *her*.

"When shall I see you again?" he asked, as he bent over her hand.

"This evening, if you wish!" she smiled, with just the faintest pressure of her fingers.

"You are very good," he murmured. "I most assuredly *do* wish."

"I'll expect you then—at nine, Montague. I want to—talk over—matters—Amherst, you know."

"At nine!" he answered, and the car rolled away.

Pendleton went in through the Club-house, and out again on the east piazza where Miss Chamberlain was playing Auction. She saw him coming and motioned to a chair beside her. Mrs. Postlewaite was a little way off, holding her usual court. Gladys glanced toward her and smiled.

"We all know it, Montague," she said. "Everyone in the Club-house and on the links knows it—and

it has been telephoned to town, I dare say: Mrs. Postlewaite asked Stephanie to have tea with her here. It's the sensation of the—year."

"And for a sensation mighty satisfactory," Pendleton returned.

"Those of us who have been for Stephanie all through can take courage—our course has been approved by the ultimate authority," Gladys observed. "If we hadn't been staunch for our friend, the Queen wouldn't have come around."

"She'll hear you, Gladys," warned Mrs. Burleston.

"Let her—I would confide the same thing to her, if she asked me.—I've never come under her authority. I'll double your three hearts, Helen."

"By!" said Miss Tazewell, after a pause to consider whether she should take her partner out of it.

"By!" said Miss Rutledge promptly.

"I'll go back—your lead, Gladys," said Mrs. Burleston.

There was silence until the last card fell—Mrs. Burleston had made good her contract.

"That's ninety-six below, and a hundred above, and simple honors," said Miss Chamberlain, as she put down the score. "You had a bully hand, Helen."

On the next deal, Miss Rutledge was the declarant. Gladys spread out her cards; then, with a significant look at Pendleton, arose and moved out to the rail.

"What else have you to tell me?" she said, as he joined her.

"How did you know?" he smiled.

"I guessed it—from your manner!" she laughed. "A woman's intuition, if you please."

"It's more than tea for Stephanie," he said. "You have only part of it.—The Porshinger matter is won."

"He has plead guilty!" she marvelled.

"Better than that."

"What—better! How can that be?"

"Mrs. Postlewaite and Mrs. Porterfield witnessed the whole episode, and have voluntarily come to Stephanie's assistance—to deny Dolittle's story, and with an offer to testify against Porshinger."

"Oh, delightful!" Gladys cried. "The Queen P's actually witnessed the whole occurrence?"

"Yes—from the little balcony which, you know, runs along one side of the conservatory."

"Does Lorraine know it?"

"No."

"Where is Stephanie?"

"Gone home."

She looked at him thoughtfully.

He looked at her and smiled.

"I'm sorry for you, Montague.—Lorraine will be the more determined than ever on a reconciliation."

"I've a bit more news," he replied seriously. "I was so pleased with the Postlewaite matter it clean escaped me, for the moment.—I've just heard that Amherst is back."

"Here—in town!" she cried.

"So I understand—he arrived this morning."

She held up her hands helplessly.

"What a complication!" she breathed.—"What will Lorraine do, do you suppose?"

"I give it up," he replied, with a shake of his head. "No one can depend on him for anything—but if he is still of the mind he was this afternoon, it would be just as well for him and Amherst not to meet."

"We're waiting, Gladys!" came Mrs. Burleston's voice.

"Coming!" Gladys replied.—"You'll do your best to keep them apart, Montague?"

"Yes—I'll do what I can; but I may have a devil of a job, and then not succeed. Lorraine's himself again, you know—which means he is as erratic as a crazy man. However——"

"Where is he now, do you know?"

"He said he was tired and was going home."

"Then let us hope he'll stay there until morning," she said.

"And that some kind friend won't call him up and put him wise," he added—and they went back to the game.

"Montague, will you either stay here or go away—*far* away, that is," Dorothy Tazewell requested—"down to the grill-room would be about right."

"Wherefore this happy consideration!" Pendleton laughed.

"So we can continue our game, stupid, without the attendant interruption of having Gladys desert us every time she's dummy."

"By which I might infer——" Pendleton began.

"Whatever you wish that is complimentary—or otherwise; it's a free for all.—Two royal!" and she smiled at him with roguish demureness.

"I'm squelched," said he, with affected sadness. "I *was* just about to ask you all to take dinner with me here this evening, but of course it is out of the question now. I'm awfully sorry it happened, you know. It's the——"

"Go 'long with you, Montague!" Mrs. Burleston exclaimed. "How can one remember the cards while that sirenly seductive voice of yours is playing on the diapason."

"Yes, run along, Montague!" agreed Dorothy—"or you'll have to pay my losses; it's a quarter of a cent a point, too, and I can't afford to lose."

"Me for the tall timber," he declined.

"Mercy! Montague," Gladys exclaimed. "One would think you were Warwick Devereux."

"I was wondering if anyone would recognize the impersonation!" Pendleton laughed.—"What is it," he asked, as a servant stopped beside him and stood at attention.

"Mr. Cameron is waiting in the grill-room, sir," the man replied.

Pendleton nodded in dismissal.

"How about having the dinner to-morrow evening?" he asked.—"Good! That's very nice indeed—will seven-thirty be convenient? All right—seven-thirty it is."

The grill was comfortably filled; the talk was of

but one subject:—Amherst's return, what it signified and what would follow.

"It's too late to kill him," said Devonshire, as Pendleton entered the room, "but if I were Lorraine, I should get me a good hefty raw-hide and beat him within an inch of his life, paying particular attention to his handsome face. When I was through with him there wouldn't be much beauty left, I can tell you."

"But can Lorraine do it—has he the strength?" asked Smithers.

"In such a case the rightness of his cause would give him strength," Devonshire returned—"and any decent chap who was handy would lend him assistance if it was needed."

"The trouble is with Lorraine himself, I think," Carstairs remarked. "It isn't that he hasn't the nerve, but that he hasn't the determination, the stability, the something essential in the man who *does*. I fancy he has changed his mind on the subject of what to do in this matter as often as he has changed his clothes. He is a queer compound—none other like him."

"And yet he is a mighty attractive fellow at times," Smithers observed.—"It wasn't until this Amherst affair that he revealed anything particularly vacillating."

"He never before had occasion to reveal it," Devonshire explained. "The trial came—and he wasn't equal to it. Some of us might not be equal to it either, if we were in similar case. It's a mighty difficult case, my friends. Moreover, Lorraine has

done the decent thing now—he is anxious for a reconciliation."

"It's decent, after a fashion," Smithers agreed—"it would be decenter if he first followed your notion and beat up Amherst—beat him until he couldn't walk; half killing would be about right, to my mind."

"This is all very well by way of discussion but what by way of prophecy?" said Carstairs. "I'll lay a bottle of wine that Lorraine doesn't do a damn thing."

"So will I," Smithers agreed. "That is why Amherst has the courage to come back. He despises the man he has wronged."

"He may be fooled," said Devonshire.

"I trust he will be," Carstairs remarked—"but I doubt mightily."

"You hear what they are saying, Pendleton?" Cameron asked, with a jerk of his head toward the other table.

"I hear," said Pendleton. "Have you seen Lorraine today?"

"No—only talked with him over the telephone."

"He hasn't heard of Amherst's return?"

"He didn't mention it."

"The evening papers will likely have it."

"I suppose so—I didn't know of it until I came up here—where it's the event of the day."

"You can't much blame them—knowing all the circumstances and the parties as club-mates do."

"What do *you* think Lorraine will do—anything?" asked Cameron.

Pendleton carefully knocked the ashes from his cigarette and studied the bare coal a moment.

"I think," said he slowly, "that it would be just as well for Amherst to keep out of Lorraine's way."

"You do?" said Cameron quietly. "Why?"

"Because Lorraine seems to have become possessed of two ideas—and like all weak men he is becoming obsessed by them. One idea is to effect a reconciliation with Stephanie; the other is to be revenged on Amherst. I have tried to persuade him that if he would do Stephanie a service, he must do Amherst no physical hurt—it would simply revive the scandal and react upon her, and probably terminate any chance he has to have her return to him."

"What chance has he?" Cameron asked. "None, to my mind."

"Not the slightest in the world, to my mind either," Pendleton replied. "But the question now is, I think, which idea will prevail:—the hope of reconciliation with Stephanie, or vengeance on Amherst. I admit I won't even attempt to predict. It will depend on the circumstances of the moment."

"With the chances in favor of violence," said Cameron instantly. "I fear it—I've feared it ever since Stephanie's return. Why the devil does Lorraine do everything too late?"

"It is the nature of the animal, I suppose. Some men seem to do everything backward."

"What do you say to both of us going to see him after dinner, and—well, trying what we can do? He may listen to us."

"If you wish I'll go—but I've given him my views on it once to-day; and while he seemed to agree, I know it was only half-heartedly. However, it will do no harm for you to go.—Amherst's return may have set him wild. Lorraine at his worst is a crazy irresponsible—and I'm rather inclined to look for the worst."

"Very good!" said Cameron. "Now about this miserable Porshinger affair. We——"

"The Porshinger affair is easy," Pendleton interrupted. "Mrs. Postlewaite has cleared that up beautifully—and Stephanie also."

"What!" exclaimed Cameron, "Mrs. Postlewaite?"

Pendleton nodded.

"Mrs. Postlewaite and Mrs. Porterfield were witnesses of Porshinger's assault on Stephanie," he replied—and he told the story.

When it was finished, Cameron's face wore a most satisfied smile.

"It is the end of Porshinger!"—he laughed, "he is busted for good. The case will never come to trial. Stephanie is completely vindicated by Mrs. Postlewaite's story. She need never think of him again. She has been a bit foolish in her conduct toward him, but that is only a passing matter, and will be lost in the general satisfaction at his complete discomfiture. What a fool he was—to risk his social life on a single throw!"

"He didn't imagine he was risking it," Pendleton rejoined. "He thought that she was dazzled by his

money and quite ready to be his. The fellow is simply drunk with his financial success. He thinks anything is within his reach; that it is simply a matter of price, and he has the price. As between him and Amherst there is mighty little choice. Amherst is a seducer; Porshinger is a purchaser who trades on the other's crime to procure a victim."

"The truth is, Lorraine would be justified in killing both," Cameron declared.

"I think that I should start with Porshinger," said Pendleton—"to me he is the more contemptible and the more criminal. To try to drag a woman down after she has made a mistake, and is endeavoring to make amends for the past! Such a man is a monster."

"You're right!" said Cameron, "right as gospel! And yet Lorraine may not—because in Amherst's case he dallied too long, and in Porshinger's, the law would view it as absolutely unjustifiable."

"Oh, surely!" Pendleton responded, "I know that you're not recommending violence—just stating what, to my mind as well as to yours, the circumstances warrant."

"I wanted to discuss Lorraine's case with you, but it isn't necessary now," Cameron remarked. "Porshinger will be only too glad if it is dropped. Lorraine can't object, for Stephanie is cleared of Dolittle's nasty story."

"Our trouble, it seems, isn't any longer with Porshinger, but with Amherst and Lorraine—either to keep them apart or to persuade the latter to be

sensible," Pendleton observed. "I confess that, if it were not for Stephanie, I wouldn't meddle in the affair. They might go their own gait. I'm disgusted with Lorraine."

"I don't blame you," the other nodded. "But, you see, Lorraine is a client of mine and I've always been fond of him, though naturally I don't approve of his course with Stephanie."

"You can go to him this evening—I shall refrain," Pendleton decided. "If you need me for anything, I'll be at the Mourrailles'. For heaven's sake! don't tell him—he may veer around and get notions as to me.—Let us have dinner. Shall I order, or do you want anything in particular?"

"Only a pint of Sparkling Burgundy—anything will do for the rest," Cameron answered. Then he raised his hand for the captain of the waiters. "Will you please have Mr. Lorraine telephoned at his apartments that I'll be in to see him on an important matter at eight o'clock this evening"

XXII

THE SILVER CANDLESTICK

STEPHANIE dressed with more than usual care that evening. It was the first time in two years that she had really wanted to dress for anyone—to look her best as a woman.

The gown she chose—after much deliberation—was black, unrelieved by any color and made severely plain; against it the dead white of her arms and shoulders shone like ivory. She stood a moment looking in her mirror; then she took from her jewel-case a sapphire necklace—smiled at it in recollection—and clasped it about her slender throat. They were the only jewels she wore—even her rings were laid aside. She wondered if *he* would notice the sapphires—and the absence of all other ornaments. It had been *his* wedding gift, and he might have forgotten—yet she would wear it on the chance that he would remark it and remember. She might not permit him any liberties, but she would grant him the privilege of inferences.

She laughed softly to herself—and ran her fingers caressingly over the jewels. His wedding gift! The only one, of all the hundreds, that she cared for now—the only one that did not suggest to her the memories of the past—of her mistake in choosing—of her broken vows—her hideous experience. But his sapphires brought only the joy of living—the hope

that some day, by some means, her freedom would be won and she would be permitted to yield herself and all she had to him. For she realized now—as she had long known, indeed—that he was the only man she cared for—the only man who cared for her and had cared through all the horrible past.

She took one last look in the mirror—at the tall, slender figure in the clinging black gown; the lovely neck and arms and shoulders; the flawless face with its proud, cold beauty, that to-night was warm with tenderness; the glorious hair piled high on the aristocratic head like a gleaming crown of gold—and then went slowly down the stairway, as joyous as though she were to be married to Pendleton that very night.

All through dinner—which she had alone, Mrs. Mourraille being absent—she thought of Montague. Not hopelessly as heretofore, but with a satisfied anticipation of present property. She did not attempt to analyze it—indeed, she was quite aware it did not admit of analysis; it was the intuitive knowledge that comes at rare intervals to women—never to men.

Near the end of the meal, the desk 'phone in the living-room rang. The butler answered it. In a moment he returned.

"Mr. Pendleton wants to know, madam, if you will be at home at a quarter to nine this evening?" he said.

"Say to Mr. Pendleton that I shall be here and very glad to see him!" Stephanie replied.

The man went to deliver the message.

"Montague is impatient," she reflected, "though,

as I never before knew him to be impatient, he must have a very good reason for coming a quarter of an hour earlier. . . . Yet why did he telephone at all—why didn't he just come?—Tompkins, was that all Mr. Pendleton said?"

"Yes, madam!" Tompkins answered, "but, if you please, it wasn't Mr. Pendleton himself; leastwise, I didn't recognize his voice."

She nodded in answer and finished her ice.

"I'll have coffee on the piazza," she said, and arose.

As she did so, the ship's clock in the hallway chimed one bell.

"Half after eight!" she thought. "Fifteen minutes more until I see him. I'm as nervously anticipatory as a débutante about to receive her first proposal. What *is* the matter with me! I'm actually becoming afraid to meet him—to meet an old friend—the best friend a woman ever had!"

She laughed to herself, and sat down where, from the electric light at the corner, she could see his car draw up at the curb.

Tompkins brought her coffee, served it, and was dismissed. She drank two cups eagerly—to steady her nerves—then poured a third, and sipped it slowly. . . . Presently the butler came out to deliver a telephone message from Miss Chamberlain; when she turned again, she was just in time to catch sight of a man coming up the walk and almost at the steps.

She sprang up and glided quickly into the house. She wanted to meet Pendleton in the brightness of

the living-room rather than in the subdued light of the piazza. She wanted him to have the benefit of the first impression. She was quite aware of her exquisite loveliness—more alluring to-night than ever before. And of the sapphires—*his* sapphires alone adorning her. She flung herself in an easy chair, crossed her silken knees with fetching abandon and caught up a magazine.

There was no ring at the bell, however—and she waited, impatiently. He should have rung—should be in the hall-way now—and yet Tompkins was not even come front! It was very strange!—Possibly he had gone around to the piazza, thinking that she might be there. She half turned—one hand on the chair arm, the other on her knee—and glanced toward the piazza door.

There came a step—and a smile of happiest greeting sprang to her face—to be chilled the next instant into frigidity.

"*You!*" she exclaimed indignantly.—"You!"

Garrett Amherst bowed low.

He was a trifle over the medium height and slender, with black hair just turning gray, and a face that women would call handsome, but that men would call effeminate because too flawless. The eyes had a peculiarly cynical expression about the corners, and the clean-shaven lips, while firm set and classic, were full and red.

"Yes, I!" he answered, and the voice was wondrously low and musical. "I am fortunate indeed to find you alone, Stephanie."

"I cannot say as much, Mr. Amherst!" she scorned.

He laughed lightly. "Time was when you were more than glad when I found you *alone*."

She glided swiftly toward the bell—but he was before her and blocked the way.

"Don't!" he said gently. "Consider—and don't. You may call—yes, you may even ring for the servants—and what, think you, will be the inference with *me*—me alone with you here—by appointment?"

"My servants never infer what it is impossible for them to believe!" she spurned. "They know I left you in disgust with myself and loathing for you—you unspeakable poltroon."

He put out his hand as though to stay her.

"You misunderstand, Stephanie dear," he said softly. "I've not come to reproach you, nor to find fault, nor to cast up the few unpleasant things in an exquisite past. I've come——" he took a step toward her—"I've come, dearest, to beseech you to forgive—to come back to me—to let me make amends." He held out his arms. "You're the only woman in the world for me—I know it now—I knew it as soon as you had left me. I've come clear from India to tell you—to take you away with me. Won't you come, dearest, won't you come?"

"You would dare!" she exclaimed tensely. "You would——"

"I would dare the gates of hell for you, sweetheart!—to hold you once again in my arms, to pil-

low your dear head upon my shoulder, to bury my face in your ruddy tresses, to have you——"

"What folly—what silly folly!" she interrupted. "I am no longer your paramour, thank God! I am trying to be an honest woman—to regain the place I lost by reason of your seductious and false tongue. Do you think I would forfeit it again even though I loved you to distraction?"

"You *do* love me, Stephanie—you——"

"I loathe you!—your honeyed words and pretty beauty that once led me astray are now simply reminders of your abominations, and the proofs of your depravity.—I ask you to leave the house at once, Mr. Amherst."

"You mean it?" he whispered. "You actually mean it?"

"I *do* mean it," she replied. "It may be difficult for such as you to comprehend—but *I mean it.* Now go."

He looked her in the eyes a moment, then he humbly bowed his head.

"I will go," he said contritely. "I will go——"

Suddenly he leaped forward—and his arms closed around her, pinioning her hands to her sides.

"But I will kiss you another time before I go—and maybe I shall——"

She fought him silently—unwilling even for the servants to see her in this man's embrace. She evaded his every attempt at her lips—she struggled—she buried her hair in his face—she felt his breath on her neck—she was carried slowly across the room—

her hair burst free and fell in waves around her, enveloping her face and shielding it somewhat from his attempts.

"You siren!" he panted. "You siren!"

"You devil!" she gasped. "You worse than devil!—Loose me! I tell you—loose me!"

"I'll loose you," he breathed,—"I'll loose you—when I've had—my——"

He raised her in his arms and bore her toward a couch—crushing her to him in a mad ecstasy that left her well-nigh senseless.

She felt herself strike the couch—felt herself flung upon it—tried to cry out and could not! With a final desperate effort that exhausted her last atom of strength, she strove to thrust him from her.

But he only laughed—and shifted his hold.

"Not yet, sweetheart!" he panted.—"Not yet——"

She closed her eyes in helplessness and sickening fear. It was useless—she could not——

Then she felt Amherst's grip on her torn loose. She opened her eyes—to see him and Harry Lorraine grappled in furious fight.

She struggled up—and watched—fascinated and silent; forgetting either to summon help or to flee.

Round the room the men reeled, locked in each other's arms—staggering against chairs and tables—hurling them aside—overturning them—crushing the bric-a-brac under foot. They were down and up, and down and up—they rolled over and over, fighting without method—Lorraine striking wildly in the fury

of insane rage, which gave him strength but deprived him of the power of thought. Amherst—taken unaware and weakened by his unhallowed passion, but with a trifle more deliberation in his manner, prevented the other from doing him serious harm. . . . . Both had been cut by the broken ornaments or by corners of the furniture. Neither man spoke. Lorraine's face was set in the fury of hate—Amherst's in the fury of desperation. Lorraine was venting the pent up wrongs of months of brooding—Amherst was fighting for his life! he had no doubt of the other's intent to kill. He was trying to get away—to break his assailant's hold. . . . But through it all Lorraine managed some way, somehow, to keep his hold—and slowly to work his hands toward Amherst's throat—one of them was already there. Amherst made a frantic effort to unloose it. They staggered down the room—swept a cabinet bare of antiques—swayed a moment back and forth—then went down, Amherst underneath.

As they writhed on the floor amid the fallen débris, Lorraine's hand touched a heavy, silver candlestick.—He seized it by the stem—there was a flash—and with all the strength of his insane fury, he brought it down on his enemy's head.

Amherst's arms relaxed—his eyes closed and the blood gushed forth. Again the candlestick rose, and fell; this time squarely on the temple—and with crunch of metal on bone, the fresh spurt of blood, Amherst's body crumpled into an inert mass.

Once more Lorraine's arm went up——

"Don't hit him again!" said Pendleton quietly —yet sharp as the crack of a whip. "You are striking a dead man, Lorraine."

The candlestick slipped from Lorraine's fingers and he staggered up—the frenzied look on his face slowly faded into one of unrelenting comprehension.

"Yes!" said he, glancing down unmoved at Amherst's body. "He is dead—damn him! I'm glad I killed him! The beast!—— Thank God! I came in time, dear," he exclaimed, turning to Stephanie.

But Stephanie had fainted.

Lorraine sprang toward her—to be brought up by Pendleton's quick command:

"Let her alone for a moment—she has only fainted—and tell me how this happened."

Lorraine, suddenly weak, collapsed on a chair.

"Never mind—I'll get some brandy——"

"No—I'm all right," Lorraine said huskily.—"It is well for you to hear before she wakes.—I was restless after dinner. I didn't wait for Cameron; I went for a walk, leaving word for him to remain until I returned. I don't know how long I walked, but presently I was aware that I was before Stephanie's home. —The lights were burning—the shades were drawn. I went in on the piazza, with no purpose, nothing but a desire to see her—you understand? As I passed this window, I noticed the door to the enclosed piazza was ajar.—I pushed it open and entered. I heard a queer sound in this room, like persons in a struggle. I dashed across—and saw—saw Stephanie flung upon

that couch, and Amherst bending over her. For an instant I was paralyzed! I saw Stephanie try to force him back; heard him laugh in triumph and say something. Then action came to me and I hurled myself upon him. We fought all over the room—you can see how we fought—he to get loose, I to get a grip on his throat and choke the life out of him. I must have had the strength of a demon, for Amherst, I think, is the stronger man. How often we fell, I do not know—sometimes he was under, sometimes I was. And all the while, 'Kill him! Kill him!' was ringing in my ears. . . . We went down again, I on top.—My hand touched the candlestick—I grasped it and struck.—I would be striking him yet if you had not stopped me." He got up slowly, his face unnaturally flushed.—"I'll go to the police station and give myself up. Let the carrion lie where he is until the officers come. You look to Stephanie—it's better——"

He staggered, put his hands to his head, swayed a moment, then pitched forward to the floor, and lay quiet.

"Good God!" cried Pendleton.

Springing to Lorraine's side, he tore open his waistcoat and placed a hand over his heart—no beat responded. He listened!—It was silent.

Lorraine was dead.

He looked at Stephanie—she was still insensible. What should he do? Two dead men, an unconscious woman, and himself! What was best for *her?*

An instant he thought.—Then he strode across, and was gathering her in his arms to bear her from the room when she opened her eyes.

She gave a gasp—saw who held her—the startled look vanished—and she smiled.

"Montague!" she said weakly. "Montague! How did you get here—how——"

She caught sight of the two forms on the floor—stared—then shuddered in sudden remembrance.

"Dead!—both dead!" she whispered. "Let me down, dear—I'm not——"

"You must come away," he said, putting her down but keeping his arm around her. "This is no place for you, sweetheart."

She suffered his arm to remain, and stood looking at Lorraine—Amherst she had recoiled from in horror!

"They killed each other?" she questioned faintly.

"No—Lorraine killed Amherst—and then was stricken either by apoplexy or a heart attack—the victim of his own frenzied emotions."

"I see!" she whispered.—"I see!"

"Come outside, dear—you need air, and I must summon a physician and the police."

"Can't we do—anything for Harry?" she asked.

"Nothing."

"At least, we can put him on the couch."

"It is wiser not."

"Must we let him lie on the floor?"

"Since he is dead, it is best not to disturb any-

thing until the police come," he replied—and slowly led her from the room.

As he did so, steps crossed the piazza and the entrance bell rang.

"They must not enter, Montague!" Stephanie exclaimed—"they must not enter!"—She sank on a chair.—"Go—tell Tompkins I am not at home to anyone!"

He met the butler at the rear of the hall.

"Mrs. Lorraine is not at home—whoever it is must be sent away," he directed.

"Yes, Mr. Pendleton!" the man bowed.

Passing the doorway to the living-room, Tompkins glanced in—and straightway his immobility of countenance vanished. He stopped, staring—terror and amazement blended on his face.

"The door, sir, the door!" said Pendleton sharply.

"Yes, sir—yes, sir!" the butler answered—and sprang to obey.

"Is Mr. Pendleton here?" came Cameron's voice.

"No, sir; Mr.——" Tompkins began—when Pendleton cut him short.

"Come in, Cameron," said he, "you're just the man I want."

"Lorraine didn't keep his appointment with me," explained Cameron, as he entered. "And——"

"Lorraine is here!" Pendleton answered, drawing the other over to the living-room door.

"Good God!" was Cameron's amazed cry.—

"*Lorraine!* and who is the other?—Amherst! *Amherst!* Dead!—what does it mean?"

"They both are dead," said Pendleton. "Lorraine killed Amherst with yonder candlestick—and then, a moment after, was stricken by apoplexy or a heart attack."

"You were here?" Cameron marvelled.

"I came in just as Amherst received the fatal blow.—Lorraine was explaining how it all happened when he himself was seized and died instantly."

"And Stephanie?"

Pendleton turned sharply to the butler, who was standing open-mouthed behind them, and said:—

"Tompkins, call up Dr. Hubbard at once and ask him to come over immediately."

He waited until the man had gone and the door was closed behind him—then he lowered his voice.

"Stephanie was here through it all—she had fainted on the couch."

"Where is she now?"

"In the piazza-room!"

"How much does she know?"

"Everything."

"Who else knows it?"

"No one."

"Not even Tompkins?"

"Not even Tompkins. He and the other servants were at dinner—their dining-room is in the rear downstairs."

"You are positive? They," with an expressive

gesture toward the floor, " must have made considerable noise."

" If you had seen Tompkins' face when he came to answer your ring, you would not doubt," Pendleton replied.

" Then why bring Stephanie into the affair? Let her know nothing—let her be upstairs—anywhere—so long as she isn't on *this floor*.—How did *you* enter? " he asked suddenly.

" Through the piazza-room."

" Are you prepared to take the risk of being—implicated—to relieve Stephanie? " Cameron asked.

" I understand," Pendleton answered. " I am willing to take the risk."

" And Stephanie can—if the extremity arise," Cameron went on, " tell the facts and relieve you. We may have to confide in the front office, but I think even that will not be necessary. Fix up the story with her while I notify the police. I'll use the upstairs telephone."

" What do you want me to tell? " asked Stephanie, entering the hall from the dining-room door.

She had regained her composure—and save for a slight flush on her cheeks she appeared as calm and self-contained as ever.

" We want to save you the painful experience of having to relate what happened—there," Pendleton replied, with a slight motion toward the living-room. " You can say that you were upstairs asleep—lying down after dinner—that you heard nothing of the

fight until something aroused you and you descended to find Cameron and me here, and the——"

"How will you account for *your* presence?" she interrupted.

"By the truth—that I came to call, entered the house by the piazza and the living-room just as Lorraine delivered the fatal blow, Lorraine's explanation of the deed, and his own sudden death."

Slowly she shook her head.

"Do you think the police will believe it?" she asked.

"Certainly—why should they doubt it?" he answered.

"Do you think the public will believe it?"

"Of course!—And what have the public to do with it anyway?"

"They might ask, both the police and the public—and the police will *have* to ask if the public demands to know—what you had to do with the killing? Your friendship to me in the past; your—devotion in the present; my—love, they will say, for you; the coincidence of Lorraine's and Amherst's visits, coupled with your own, and that *you* survive while *they* died—all, all will make most startling inferences, don't you think, Montague?"

"Not in the least, dear!" he smiled, though he knew she spoke the truth—at least so far as the public was concerned. To it there would always be something unexplained about the tragedy; something that either he or Stephanie could have made plain—and would not. "My reputation and standing in the com-

munity, and the reputation of my family before me, is sufficient answer to such inferences," he added.

Again she shook her head.

"No man's reputation should be taxed—where murder has been done and self-interest can be imputed—when the truth can be told by an eye-witness," she decided. "I shall have to speak eventually, so it is much the wiser to speak at once—to delay will only breed doubt of my tale. I shall tell the story, dear."

"No—you shall——"

"Yes, dear; I shall tell the story."

It was final. Even Pendleton realized it.

"Am I worth it, little woman?" he asked.

"It is *I* who am not worthy," she replied—"I never have been worthy of your—love."

He held out his arms.

"Sweetheart!" he cried.

She went to him, with an adorable smile and a sigh of supreme content.

"If you wish it, dearest," she whispered, "if you wish it—after a little time."

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